

# ABORIGINAL SCIENCE FICTION

Tales of the Human Kind

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Impact

*By Ben Bova*



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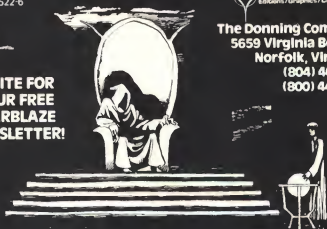
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# When the Stranger Comes

By Paul A. Gilster

Art by Larry Blamire

Things change their shapes in the northwest fjord country. Jon Stefansson knew this was true, but it was not something you talked about. Jon still remembered the sheep shrieking in their pen that night long ago. He and his father rushed out to find three of the creatures gutted, their entrails smoking in the icy twilight. What kind of animal could do that, so quiet, so quick?

Something that could change its shape at will, thought Jon. Something that was no longer there when you came running with the rifle. Something that left no tracks.

Jon lay in the darkness, listening to the wind as it fingered the walls of the house. Winter was early this year. The radio said low pressure was deepening over the Greenland Sea, and snow squalls already pelted the coast. Soon they would sweep inland. The wind would be inside the house then, pushing its way through the chinks in the stone. By tomorrow, snow would choke the passes and nothing human would move on the packed crust.

The house was not the same with the boy here. Jon had opened the door that evening to find his huge shape filling the doorway. He wore a two-week growth of beard, a green military jacket, hair that fell to the shoulders. His mouth was set in a wide grin, revealing perfect, American teeth.

"Hi," he said, breathing hard. "I'm sort of caught." He hooked a thumb over his shoulder, where dark clouds had crept over the mountains to the east.

"Yes? What is it you want?" Jon dropped into an English he hadn't used for years.

"Well..." The boy grinned at him idiotically.

"There is a cabin for hikers in twenty kilometers, along the road to Isafjordur. There is no place for you here."

Jon tried to push the door shut but found to his amazement that the boy resisted him. A huge, red hand came around the door. The grin stayed fixed.

"Really. I'm sorry. It's the weather."

And so it had begun. Jon wondered again if he should have forced him away with the rifle. But the wind was already moaning against the roof, and soon afterward the first snow flakes appeared outside the window. The boy might never have made it through the passes.

*I am no murderer, thought Jon.*

He sat up in the bed in pre-dawn darkness. The boy's presence in the house was palpable. Jon could hear him breathing (or was that the wind?).

There had been no one else in the house since Einar moved away. He and his brother had never been close; Einar left the farm to go to Reykjavik when Jon was just six. He sold clothes in a small shop on Austurstraeti. The night before he left, Einar and his father argued far into the night. A slap, a curse, a slamming door — this was Jon's memory of Einar.

Jon had only been to Reykjavik once, when his father took him. He remembered broken sidewalks and squat houses with flowers in the window boxes. His father spent three days looking for work (a yearly ritual), but everyone knew he was a drunkard and even his cousin at the whaling station refused to hire him. Giving up as always, he spent the weekend drinking in their room at the boarding house and slept completely through their final day in the city. Jon sat beside him and watched the ships making their turn past Reykjanes for the open sea.

The boy was like an ulcer in the house, rendering sleep impossible.

Jon had not known where to put the American. The night was too cold to leave him in one of the out-buildings with the sheep. There was only Einar's room, which Jon had converted to a study. Let him sleep there, then. And on his way in the morning. What was a hiker doing out at this time of year anyway?

"It's only for the night," the boy had said. "Hey, I'm sorry about this. I wouldn't ask, but it's getting so cold."

Jon grunted. What did he expect? Winter was raging into the north Atlantic. Yes, it was cold.

What was worst was that the American wanted to talk. Jon had heated the stew he made earlier in the week, offering some to the boy.

"The name is Matthews," he said, taking the bowl from Jon and eyeing it critically. "Hal Matthews."

Jon nodded, aware that he was being asked his own name, and finding pleasure in not responding. "You have chosen a very bad time of year to hike in this country," he said, going to the stove. He returned with a cup of hot tea that steamed in the pale light. The American was a hunched shape against the wall.

Matthews was from Connecticut. He told Jon about going to school at Yale, and his decision to forego graduate study for a year while he pondered his future. It seemed to Jon that Americans spent their lives in fruitless searches for what they already had. They were a spoiled and foolish people.

"Your farm is a long way from anywhere," Mat-



thews said, finishing the bowl of stew and getting up to put it on the table. "Don't you ever get lonely?"

Jon grunted. "This valley is my home. I grew up here, along with my brother and father. Einar moved away long ago. My father is dead."

"But the isolation...."

Jon felt a flash of anger at the insistent Matthews. He could see the reaction in the American's face, and realized that he had forgotten how to conceal his feelings. That thought made him angrier still. Why should he conceal them? This was his land, his home. He would do as he chose.

"When you leave," Jon said, "where will you go? To Flateyri? Or on to Isafjordur?"

Matthews studied him. "I don't know." He said it with a certain caginess, as though deciding to play Jon's game and conceal as much as he could. "You know, maybe I'll wander around this area a while. I could stay at that cabin you mentioned for a week or so."

"There is nothing to see here."

But in Jon's mind the stark shape of the Eagle's Beak rose against the sky. The mountain towered over the valley from the north, the croft huddling at its base. From its summit you could see the Arctic Ocean.

"I've met a lot of people in these farmsteads up here," Matthews said. "They talk about going to Reykjavik eventually. Like everybody goes there sooner or later. So I mean, it's funny to find someone like you. I guess you're sort of a throwback. The old Iceland."

"Reykjavik." Jon said the word deliberately, letting his distaste flavor the air. "Let them go there. Let them go to hell."

Matthews raised his eyebrows but said nothing.

"Do you know, Matthews, just after the war started, a German submarine sailed into the harbor at Reykjavik. Many Icelanders went to the dock to see this U-boat. They were proud of themselves because they threw stones at the boat. They thought they taught the Germans a lesson about who their friends were. Stupid. They did not see that the Germans won. They brought the war with them. Soon the British came, then the Americans, strutting about this land as if they owned it. Germans, Americans, what did it matter? The world had come in."

The lamp was smoking badly now, its acrid stink burning Jon's eyes. Matthews sat in the darkness, a shadow cowering his head. He looked like a figure of Death that Jon had seen in the church at Husavik, painted on an ancient, weathered panel.

"Like I came in," Matthews said.

When he finally slept, Jon grew cold, colder than he could ever remember being. His dreams congealed into a cocoon of ice, trapping him at its core. He lay at the top of the Eagle's Beak. The valley shimmered in moonlight below him, the croft and its outbuildings ghostly shapes just beyond the ridge line. As he watched, yellow light from the distant windows refracted, distorted by the hardening ice.

And so he dreamed, entombed, until a crash brought him to his senses. It was the door, swinging wildly with the wind. He rushed to it, finding the bolts

undone, and footprints leading out into the night. Something was moving on the ridge line above the house, a black shape almost lost in the snow. Climbing toward the Eagle's Beak.

Jon made a pot of coffee, its chicory-laden scent filling the air. While it perked on the stove, he tuned the radio. The storm had unexpectedly turned north during the night and was moving out to sea. By mid-morning the snow would end. The passes through the mountains remained open.

Jon cursed. The boy could have gone on last night. There had been no reason for any of this to happen.

Pouring a cup of coffee, Jon pulled his chair close to the kerosene heater and sat back to wait for Matthews. He thought about the American in his green jacket and thick boots going up the escarpment, but the image wavered and refused to coalesce. Only the shape of the Eagle's Beak was clear to him, as it had been that night forty years ago, silhouetted by the moon.

The first winter of the war had been bitterly cold. That night the wind hissed through the passes, driving spikes of frigid air beneath the door and through the battered frame of the window. The cries of the sheep woke Jon an hour before dawn. He ran to the door and drew the bolt as his father swore in the darkness, fumbling for his boots and knocking over a chair.

"Get the gun," his father said. "Something's at the sheep."

When they ran through the snow to the outbuildings, they found the sheep terrified but unharmed. They milled about, nipping at each other, eyes wide in the sudden light from the lantern. Jon's father finally slammed the door, and had started back toward the house when they heard it. A high whine, on the very edge of audibility, lancing the ears.

Night became day. An incandescent flame arced over the ridge, bisecting the sky, followed by the dull crump of an explosion. The after-image flared purple in Jon's retinas and only faded later, after his father had seized the rifle and started working his way up the slope to see what had fallen. Jon cried out, staggering through the snow to run after him.

A furnace roared on the Eagle's Beak, secondary explosions blasting jagged pieces of metal into the darkness to fall clattering down the mountainside. Something taller and wider than a man had come out of the flames, a shape that wouldn't quite focus in Jon's eyes. Fantastically, like melting wax, it chang-

## Our Next Issue

The next issue of *Aboriginal Science Fiction* will feature return appearances by several *ABO* regulars including Patricia Anthony, Robert A. Metzger, Emily Devenport and newcomers Jamil Nasir and Phil Jennings — which will mark the first time we've ever published a story by one of the characters who appeared in one of our stories. If that doesn't make sense, don't worry — Laurel Lucas will explain it in her *Aborigines* column next issue.

ed form as he watched. Almost man-like features dissolved, melted into a sphere, became a writhing network of hands and eyes.

Above the creature a wheel of brilliant blue light appeared. Circle turned within circle, tiny motes of brilliance orbiting a central fire. Then the wheel winked out, to be replaced by a field of swarming lights, with numbers and symbols near each.

There was a shot, the smell of powder in the air. The creature ignited, an internal glow that lit pulsing organs amid a lace of fiery filaments. Jon heard liquid splattering into the snow.

Numbers appeared in the air again. Mathematical symbols Jon could not fathom. Equations.

A second shot rang out.

The writhing form compressed, became oval, stretched. Became a tapered cylinder like a seal. Glowed blue, then red. Became a snapping jaw.

Jon gaped as the jerking carapace howled in the snow. And then he was whirled to one side, dragged by his arm ten yards through the powder. His father's face was mottled by the dancing flames. "Run."

They slid in the deep drifts making their way down the ridge line, falling flat as a final explosion behind them turned the crevices of the valley violet and left blistering burns on Jon's neck.

Scattered fires still burned by the next afternoon but the wreckage had cooled. They searched the area all day in ever widening circles but found no tracks. The attack came just after midnight. Jon and his father ran out into the agate night to find the terrified sheep crowded together in a corner of the building.

Bloody fragments of flesh littered the hut, gnawed bones and tissue black in the lantern's glow.

And outside, where the creature must have fled, there was nothing. The snow stood undisturbed, gently piling into drifts. They searched behind the hay and up in the loft, then out from the croft by moonlight. There were no tracks.

Jon's father took the gun and went up the ridge while Jon guarded the house. He didn't come back. Searching for him in the morning, Jon found both bodies in a crevice on the Eagle's Beak, surrounded by shadows of twisted metal that rose in bizarre patterns, like the alphabet of an undecipherable language. He buried his father that afternoon, in the bank by the frozen stream.

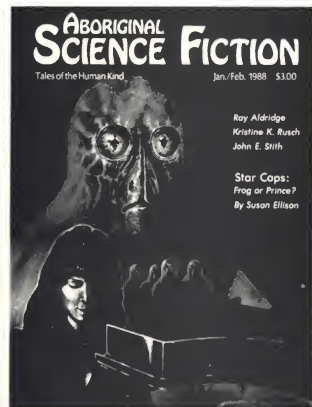
The creature he left where it had fallen. It lay in the hushed light in the form of a huge, segmented snake, stinking like drying fish. On the day that Gisli Asgeirsson came to the croft to say a blessing over his father's grave, Jon showed the priest what had killed his father. Gisli marveled at the shell-like flange, the armored legs.

The priest crossed himself. "Blasphemy is here made flesh," he said.

In the spring, when the snow melted, huge, bleached bones lay under a brilliant sky. The shards of metal, twisted by obscene force, gleamed in the sunlight. They did not rust. In the coming years, they stood there as though impervious to wind and rain, detritus washed up from the cosmic sea.

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(Continued to page 56)



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March/April 1988

PAGE 7





# To Be An Auk

By Elaine Radford  
Art by David R. Deitrick

In their new adult suits of black and white, the stump-winged birds might have been a flock of penguins pressing against my knees, their compressed bills opening like flowers to show their bright yellow gapes. I handed down the last fish and scratched the handiest bird above the beak where an oval of white would sprout in summer. The great auk closed its eyes and stretched its comical head in satisfaction. The others chortled softly as they settled into the job of digestion; a few waddled about slowly while the rest lolled on their snowy bellies. Only when the reporter spoke was I jolted back into an awareness of the cameras and the itchy microphone taped against my neck.

"Dr. Buller, what made you choose the great auk out of all the possible candidates for resurrection?" he asked, ignoring the bird that tugged curiously at his trousers.

More wary than my birds, I hesitated. It would be rude to point out that no one wants the passenger pigeon in its billions feeding on the ruined hills of Ohio, that farmers would rather shoot the Carolina parakeet than watch it sample their fruit. Certainly I couldn't describe how I decided that the great auk, eater of trash fish, breeder on worthless rock, just might have some slim chance of escaping the all-devouring maw of humanity. Finally I said simply that it was my lifetime dream to restore the first bird ever called a penguin to its harsh northern waters. The public, I know, loves it when a man as wind-battered and Yankee-rough as I waxes romantic.

When the TV crew packed up its gear and left, satisfied that it had witnessed the salvation of a species, I wouldn't have known how to dissuade them. They'd seen the lab, interviewed the biologists, filmed the computer analysis of damaged cell matter coaxed from ancient museum specimens, even ventured into the recombinant lab where we cooked up the fresh cells in glittering glass tubes. They think — their viewers who send the money think — that the real work is over. I've conceived and raised to adulthood twenty-seven living examples of *Alca impennis*, a bird that has not walked on this earth since 1844, when the last two birds (a breeding pair caring for their single egg) were killed by collectors in "much less time than it takes to tell it."

But it was never my intention to raise up these little retarded people in auk suits who clown so charmingly for the camera. There are enough people, much more than enough people, and I have never yet met

one worth striving for. I meant to resurrect a *bird*, its lifestyle and behaviors as well as its body. Perhaps it would have been better if the arrogant twentieth-century sociobiologists were right — if all behavior was engraved in the genes, my worries would be over. But things are never that simple. Instincts are the flimsiest plastic guides to life, easily perverted. My auks have learned to be my children, and I do not know how I, merely human, shall teach them what it is to be an auk.

\*\*\*\*\*

Sarah thought she could do it. Perhaps. She would have to be better than the behaviorist who suggested weaning the auks from humankind with an escalating series of electric shocks, better than the anonymous men who prefer birds to people and hence seem too much like me to teach them caution.... Sarah was certainly different. I'd been startled when she appeared in my office.

"I'm Sarah Wingate, the aviculturist who phoned you about the position," she said as she walked in, offering her tiny hand. I shook it, feeling the fine bones through her paper-thin skin. With her short dark hair feathered around the bleached-bone whiteness of her face, she might have been an auk herself were it not for the fragile delicacy of her features. "I appreciate your taking the time to talk with me. Although I realize that you were advertising for an ornithologist, I think I can demonstrate that I'm really what you want."

Her confidence took my breath away. I could probably break her slender back with my two hands and could certainly send her packing without the job for which she hadn't the proper degree, but she was as fearless as one of the auks I'd raised from single-cellhood. "I'm not sure what you can do for me," I said. "Aviculture deals with captive birds. My goal is to teach my auks how to survive in the wild."

She smiled. "Practical experience with retraining birds is what I have to offer, Dr. Buller. From the time I was able to walk, I worked with my parents in their raptor breeding facility. A large part of our work consisted of preparing captive-born birds of prey for life in the wild. More recently, I participated in a private project to monitor the release of captive-bred Venezuelan siskins back into the Amazon rain forest. I've taught hawks how to be hawks, eagles how to be eagles, and finches how to be finches. Now I'd like nothing better than the opportunity to teach auks how

to be successful auks — because I know I'll do it right."

I'd heard promises before. "How would you proceed?" I asked.

She shrugged. "I don't want to get locked into an agenda before I've observed the birds, but I'll probably start by weaning the birds from your care. They're going to have to learn to focus on one another if they're going to form a successful breeding colony, and their strong affection for you could interfere with that. I'll probably be hauling out the feed, cleaning the pens and pool, anything that involves close physical contact with the birds — at least until the birds stop showing such an extreme dependence on you." She smiled again as I raised an eyebrow. "Don't worry about my size. I'm used to carrying more than my own weight."

"I was more concerned about the emotional reaction of the birds," I confessed. "When I've tried to wean them from me in the past, they've gone off their feed and acted so depressed I feared for their lives."

She nodded. "Sure. And if you were dealing with a single bird, you'd have good reason to worry. But in this case, I think you'll find that the auks will learn to transfer that considerable affection to each other. May we try it?" She rose, ready to get to work. I found myself feeling half-tricked, half-relieved as I shook her hand once more to seal our bargain.

\*\*\* \*\*

The crew was doubtful about my choice at first. All were experienced biologists who'd often complained that they hadn't gone to college to shovel auk shit. But they grumbled more than ever now that Sarah, observing that the flock seemed to show a special interest in all human males, banned the whole team from the pen. For the first couple of days, you could hear the birds croaking from inside, and the men grew twitchy as they worked in the lab.

They regularly visited the monitor in my private office, where they shook their heads at Sarah's brusque, unsentimental handling.

"She's not even a real scientist," one of the older men, a microbiologist, grumbled. "Just a damn budgie-breeder." He spat the last two words on the ground like a curse.

By the third day, a couple of auks had lost such a dangerous amount of weight that they had to be tube-fed. I watched the monitor with growing concern, my heart squeezed tight, as Sarah snaked a length of plastic down the throat of one of my birds. The vet assisting her held the auk firmly as it kicked feebly against its food. When Sarah removed the tube, the bird promptly regurgitated its unsatisfactory meal. I turned away, having seen quite enough.

Within seconds, I was at the rear of the auk house, key in hand. I paused for a heartbeat, remembering that I'd promised to let Sarah alone while she weaned the birds from my presence. But my promise to the birds themselves — the promise of life — had to supersede that vow. I opened the door.

Quick as thought, Sarah was there, pushing me back and slamming the door behind us. "What are you doing?" she cried. "One of the birds is still inside on the table!"

"That bird needs me," I said. "Your experiment

has gone far enough."

"It's time that bird grew up and learned to eat without Mommy," Sarah replied. "You come in there now and I'll have to start weaning it all over again."

"It's dying," I said. "It can't sustain this kind of weight loss."

"It won't have to," she said. "The crying's already stopped, and most of the birds are feeding at near-normal levels. I doubt we'll have to tube-feed anyone after tomorrow. But if you interrupt now and we have to start the whole trauma over from scratch, well, then I can't guarantee any happy endings—"

I shook my head. "Can't risk it." I opened the door and strode in, brushing her aside. Marlene Canyon, the vet, was washing up. The auk was nowhere to be seen.

"Lo, Dr. Buller," she said cheerfully. "Come for a look at the weight charts?"

"I came for a look at my birds," I said firmly.

"Give 'em two more days," she replied in that same artificial voice that she used for reassuring the birds.

"Now," I said.

"Now?" She looked behind me at Sarah, and her eyes sparkled. "You sure about that?"

"I'm sure," I said.

Then I felt the sting of the hypodermic. I turned to snatch the needle from Sarah's slim hand but never completed the motion.

I woke thirty-six hours later, Sarah's birdlike head hovering over me. "You're fired," I said.

"The birds are doing splendidly," she replied. "They just needed a little time to convince themselves they could make it without Mommy."

"Damn you. I'm not their Mommy." My voice was weak and crackly, and I wasn't ready to show that I agreed that the progress of the birds was worth my ludicrous drugging.

She saw through me, though, and uttered a laugh that was more relief than amusement. "Of course you are," she said. "Of course you are."

\*\*\* \*\*

A month passed and the birds thrived, though they always rushed me on their clumsy legs should I happen to walk near the pen. It was the wrong time of year for courting, but Sarah insisted that certain birds were developing favorites, a sure sign that they were no longer fixated on a large male human. Meanwhile, the boys in the lab reported that another couple of cultures had almost certainly taken. It was a time for basking in a sense of accomplishment, maybe dreaming a little. Perhaps I would be ready to release a colony of auks in a year or two, returning a once-existent species to the wild for the first time in history. Perhaps....

Then the *Zugunruhe*, the urge to migrate, hit.

There's a very good reason why most pet birds hail from the tropics or the Australian drylands, where nomadic wandering replaces the violent drive to migrate found in so many northern temperate birds. A German keeper once told me that American robins will break their bodies on their cages during the migration season, if their flights aren't precisely designed to be small enough to prevent them from

gaining momentum without being too small to prevent the diseases of boredom and lack of exercise. And the common loon, a lake analog to the auk that has just barely maintained its ability to get into the air, will starve or mutilate itself if denied the chance to join its migrating fellows.

So perhaps it wasn't surprising that when the air turned crisp the auks suddenly refused to eat, preferring to bash their precious heads against the walls of their pool. Again and again, they'd dive, swim violently, and crash into the concrete wall. One bird bloodied its head by banging it repeatedly against the side of the pool, and I feared for its life when it refused to eat or take comfort even when Sarah brought it to me and placed it in my arms. I felt let down, betrayed. "What do you suggest we do about this, Miss Wingate?" I asked in a tense voice.

Her eyes flashed as she met my gaze. "What you always intended to do," she said slowly. "Set them free."

"Are you mad? My birds aren't ready for release! They don't know where to go or how to catch their own fish or—I!"

"My birds, Dr. Buller?" Her tone was arch. "I thought we'd progressed beyond that."

"They're just not ready," I repeated stubbornly.

"Of course we'll have to go with them," she said.

"Show them the way. Teach them to fish. Alert them to the dangers."

"It's too soon," I answered flatly. She shrugged as she filled a squeeze bulb with pureed fish. The auk, alert to her intentions, twisted in my arms and clenched its odd bill tightly shut. By the time it had regurgitated its third insufficient meal onto my shirt, I was ready to hear her out.

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The enormous breeding colonies of great auks had been centered in two areas, Funk Island, off the coast of Newfoundland, where the flightless birds were too close to predacious man to long survive, and the Bird Island chain off the southwest coast of Iceland. I preferred the latter as the starting point for the migration, since I hoped that the birds might return to Eldey (Fire) Rock to breed as had a large group of their extinct ancestors. True, the stability of the chain is doubtful — in fact, an 1830 volcanic explosion had sunk a sizable great auk breeding colony along with a rocky island — but I felt the birds could handle the intermittent catastrophes of nature better than the ongoing catastrophe of humanity. Travel from Eldey to the Outer Banks of North Carolina, where I planned to teach the birds to winter, was perhaps more hazardous for us humans than sticking more closely to the Atlantic coastline, but I was never in this business for humans. My birds were going to have the best possible chance to make it.

There would be two rafts accompanying the birds on their migration, as well as the helicopter assist, for Sarah insisted on leading the birds herself. "I'd rather downplay your role, keep you in the background as much as possible," she said. "The birds need to keep their emotional attention focused on one another." I knew she was right, and I must confess I wasn't concerned enough about the danger to her to stop her. The

birds had to come first. Their lives had been stolen from them for well over a century, and it was worth some risk to give them back. I still believe this.

The water was rough around Eldey Island when we landed the choppers, but then it's always rough. The auks tumbled out of their carrier boxes and began to preen unconcernedly as the crew hunted in vain for a smooth spot to set up the tents. "Hope you like sleeping on rocks, boss," Larry said as a stake snapped in his hands. But I only half-heard him as I breathed the salt spray and studied the white-tipped waves. It would be a rough ride.

Sarah set up a light, low fence around the preening birds; we needed nothing more complex since this tiny rock had no predators to bother us. Gannets, kittiwakes, murres, and razorbilled auks, the small, flighted cousins of the great auk, flew up from their roosting places in some agitation, the gulls scolding us vigorously while the other birds studied us in cautious silence. Soon enough, the first bold razorbill had flown into the pen to investigate the greats, and Sarah couldn't resist tossing it a bit of fish. A reckless action! Within minutes, a thousand birds were upon us, begging. They had forgotten the terrible slaughter of over a century ago; one scrap from humanity's table and they were ready to be our friends. Such trust reminded me of the accounts of how the greats were exterminated: rushing up to greet the human ships, they had been herded on board and slaughtered, unable to escape on their stumpy wings. I hardly knew whether to laugh or cry. The twenty-seven greats, though, had no such doubts. Their red-encircled eyes studied their flighted fellows with what I can only describe as unalloyed wonder.

\*\*\*\*\*

For the first few days, I monitored the weather reports coming from the south while Sarah supervised the great auks. Released onto the rocky beach, the birds proved enthusiastic if not accomplished fishers. Sarah found it difficult to round them up at the end of the short, gray October days, and I had to use their special love for me to call them in, hallooing from the beach till the last of the stragglers returned. "They're fit, energetic, and rarin' to go," was Sarah's evaluation. "So how's the weather?"

"There's a storm breaking up along the southern coast," I said. "But everything's calm at this end, and the gusting should be over before we reach the Mason-Dixon line. If the birds are agreeable, I guess we can leave tomorrow."

She grinned. "Great! Even using your inexpressible charm, I don't think I could have held them back much longer."

My charm, indeed! Annoyed, I turned away to give the order for the final raft preparations. After a moment, Sarah walked away.

\*\*\*\*\*

The migration would be risky. No matter how carefully we chose our starting date, we were sure to see storms, predators, and exhaustion before the end of the month that it would take us to reach the Outer Banks. If not for the helicopter assist, the journey would have been too dangerous for sane human beings. Yet my heart pounded with excitement as we

loaded up and headed out.

Sarah played the part of the "lead" bird, while I rounded up stragglers from the rear and sides. Not that we really knew very much about the migration customs of the great auk — that has been lost — but we assumed that the more experienced "birds" (Sarah and I) would be expected to guide the yearlings since, as with most large birds, the details of the route had to be learned. We humans, of course, could cheat, since our radios kept us on track with the help of a satellite guidance system!

I expected a couple of false starts, but the auks cooperated beautifully, diving after us as we pushed off. Sarah didn't even need the bait she'd planned to toss after her as a bribe; as she'd promised, the birds were rarin' to go. I circled the rear of the flock easily, counting the eager heads held high out of the water. Everything looked fine. After a moment, Sarah switched on her motor and picked up some speed, and the auks, as one bird, dived gracefully to begin their long flight through the water.

\*\*\* \*\*

"I shouldn't have looked back so often," Sarah was complaining at the end of the third day. We were scrunched down on an unlikely bit of rock that the auks had spotted earlier in the afternoon, grateful that we wouldn't be spending this night at sea but now hoping for the further miracle of escaping the relentless wind. "God's turned me into a pillar of salt."

I looked at her wind-whipped skin and salt-strung hair, then rubbed at the coarse beginnings of a beard that had sprouted on my chin.

"I guess by the time we get to North Carolina we'll look about how they expect a couple of crazy Yankees to look," she continued. I shrugged. "You sure don't talk much, do you, Jacob?"

I shrugged again. "Not much to talk about. Things're going fine. You're doing a splendid job."

"Well, thank you." She grinned. "Wish I had that one on tape. The boys'll never believe it."

I stood. Instantly the auks, who had been lolling about on the rocks in various positions of decadent ease, stretched their alert necks. Behind me, Sarah sighed, a sound almost lost in the constant wind. Almost.

\*\*\* \*\*

Three weeks passed. We were never more than a few miles offshore now. The auks persisted in swimming inward toward the richer shoals of fish that clustered around oil rigs and floating trash. The exposed skin that had been whipped dry up north was now slick with grime and filthy water, and the birds were as slim as black-and-white arrows. The greater part of each day was spent herding the auks away from the fishing trawlers. It was a frustration to me that the same affection which kept them near me was the only thing that seemed to prevent them from diving headlong into a killing net. Could they never be weaned from humanity? Would they ever again be a natural species?

Sarah must have been thinking along the same lines, for in the quiet of a moonless night, she asked me how many times I would be willing to accompany the birds on their semi-annual migrations. "As many

times as it takes," I said grimly. Then we both stared silently at our vulnerable group of twenty-seven birds sleeping on the gentle waves. One careless net could scoop them up. Perhaps I had been wrong. Perhaps there was no place left in the world, even for the gentle great auk.

In the morning, the radio crackled with some impatience. "Late hurricane forming to the south," Joe said.

I'd been afraid of that very thing. "Guess we'd better hurry it up."

"You ought to make landfall at the Outer Banks in two more days," he replied. "Should be time."

"Yeah."

The wind had picked up a little, energizing the birds; they frisked through the tops of the waves like porpoises. Spray stung my face like a swarm of mosquitoes as I circled round the back, trying to keep everyone close together. Sarah was moving just ahead of the main flock with one of the more aggressive birds at her side. It nuzzled at her raft periodically, as if puzzled by the strange feel of this plastic bird. The wind blustered some more, and the first drizzling began. By nightfall, the chopper had called down to order us in. "Storm's coming in faster than we thought," Joe said in a tight, impersonal voice.

"I can't leave the birds out here alone," I said flatly.

His sigh crackled in my radio. "We can airlift 'em the rest of the way, Jacob."

Sarah tossed me a look from the other raft. I nodded at her grimly. "And waste the month we spent teaching them where to go? Sorry, Joe. I can't do it."

"Lord, Jacob, send the girl in at least—"

"Tell him the girl won't go!" Sarah yelled.

"They're my birds," I said to her. "My responsibility. You don't have to—"

"Bull I don't have to. You think I'd leave you out here all by yourself? Those birds need some kind of back-up."

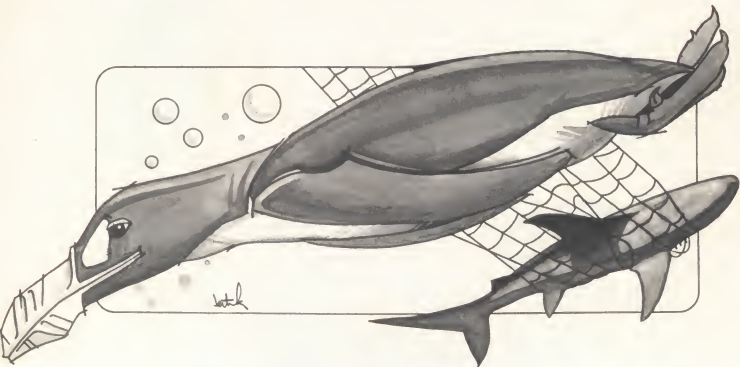
The thought that the birds would have a better chance of having somebody to lead them through if there were two of us shut me up quick. Joe cursed us for a couple of fools when I ordered him to take the chopper in without us. No use risking the rest of the crew. Anyway, once the gale-force stuff hit, they wouldn't be able to do anything for the birds anyway. It was entirely up to me and Sarah now.

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Night. The sky was low and featureless. I shivered in the darkness and wondered how it was possible that it could be warm enough for a hurricane to shape up just a few hundred miles to the south. Sarah's body was a dark shape on the other raft. The auks, bothered by something they sensed in the gusty wind, only half-dozed on the water around me; as soon as one black head slumped down, another strained upward, peering anxiously at me for reassurance. I made the right soothing noises and looked forward to Sarah's watch. On this voyage, the only time I had alone was when I slept.

The wind changed, and there was a sudden foulness in the air. The stench of death. I looked about for the lights of the trawler, then for the faraway flash





of the ship that had dumped some trash. Nothing. Darkness. Not even a single star overhead. The auks croaked anxiously, and I became aware of a weak splashing. The first head, a bird just above me, vanished. I flashed my light downwards and caught a glimpse of terrified red eyes trapped inside some kind of netting. "Sarah!" I yelled as I slipped off my life jacket and dived to its rescue. I was only dimly aware that the other birds were following me, swimming down toward their trapped companion.

Something tugged at my arms. I slashed impatiently with my knife, dropping the light I'd held in the same hand. Damn! I gulped some air and jumped after it. Then terror grabbed me as I was swallowed up by netting. I hadn't known the trap was so large. For an instant, I hesitated. I couldn't slash wildly in the dark, risk cutting my birds. Then my lungs began to ache. I moved forward tentatively, feeling the heavy plastic twist about my arms and chest as I awkwardly moved the knife into position. A slim shape nuzzled me in the darkness and I touched it briefly, the only reassurance I could offer. Then I began to gently slice the bonds that held us tight. And then the lights came on.

Oh, God. I saw what I was doing. With the last breath of my burning lungs, I was setting free a young gray shark. I felt myself go still with utter terror.

Yes, of course I knew that the shark must have eaten its fill; it was, after all, the promise of an easy meal that had trapped it in this net full of dying fish. And yes, I knew that this cold-blooded predator, an expert in cadging meals from sick or injured animals, would rather flee from a healthy human than devour him. But still I froze in superstitious fear. Not for myself. For my birds.

And then Sarah was at my side, the warning lamp

of her raft directed down to light her dive. She worked swiftly, as if she'd read my mind, cutting free the trapped auks before making the slightest move in my direction. And even in the depths of my fear, I was aware enough to be grateful for the miracle that I didn't have to be able to speak for her to understand what was most important.

The last auk bobbed up above me. Sarah shoed the flock away, her lips shaping into the unlikely scrawl of a distressed gull. Then she swam down to me at last. Her knife gleamed. All of this took much less time than it takes to tell it.

I bounded upward, choked in all the ill-smelling air I could get, and only then looked around to see what she was doing. "Sarah. No!"

"I won't leave them trapped here," she said, her knife still busy. There seemed to be a forest of eyes below her, and I wondered just how many of those eyes belonged to sharks. The gill net lost by the fisher had kept on fishing, kept on attracting hungry predators into its deadly coils ... and now Sarah dived among them, planning to release them into the dark waters.

"They'll kill our birds!" I cried.

She bobbed up to rest a moment and looked me in the face. "Most of them are harmless. And most of the sharks are dead. They can sleep for a few hours, sure, but then they die if they can't keep swimming, keep that oxygen moving over their gills. Even a 'damn budgie-breeder' knows that much. What I don't know is how long they've been here already."

I knew she was right. The sharks wanted nothing more than to get away, the same as the other fish. But how could I risk it? How could I trust?

(Continued to page 63)

# BOOKS

By Darrell Schweitzer

## American Fantasy



One of the characteristics of the generic fantasy — you know, those medieval, Tolkienoid things with castles and quests, dragons and damsels — is that it has a distinctly European flavor, in as much as it has any flavor at all. After all, the United States is too young a country to have any proper epics. Our culture is a pan-European stew. This is not to deny that the *Song of Roland* or *Beowulf* or even *The Odyssey* are part of the cultural heritage of any American writer. My own ancestry is largely German-French, with a sprig of Welsh and a touch of Irish, so who's to say that a millennium ago some forebear of mine didn't touch up the *Tain* or interpolate a line into the *Nibelungenlied*? After all, as authors of time-travel stories know (particularly the sort where somebody goes back and impregnates his many-times-great-grandmother), the gene pool spreads out over the centuries until we are all about equally descended from William the Conqueror or Attila the Hun or Ulf, an obscure peasant who lived in Thuringia in the time of Charlemagne.

But at the same time, it follows that a particular culture is more *alive* for people still inhabiting the very earth whence it sprang. So, while any American has a perfect right to produce Celtic fantasy, for the American,

it's more a matter of book-learning, and maybe a visit to Ireland. That sort of thing might have come more naturally to James Stephens, who was Irish.

All this may go some distance



to explain why, until very recently at least, virtually all the great, traditional fantasies based on European legendry were written by Europeans. For the Americans, the material was remote, almost an affectation. (Look at James Branch Cabell's work — very affected indeed.)

What surprises me is that more American writers haven't done the obvious and plunged into the underbrush where the Redcoats can't follow. Why haven't we seen more distinctly American fantasies? Stephen Vincent Benet wrote some wonderful ones back in the 1930s, but for years the chief practitioner of the art was the late Manly Wade

Wellman. And he had few followers.

But now we have, at last, a major American fantasy:

**Seventh Son**  
By Orson Scott Card  
Tor, 1987  
241 pp., \$17.95

and ...

**Red Prophet**  
By Orson Scott Card  
Tor, 1988  
311 pp., \$17.95

Card is, of course, best known for his science fiction. He's been enjoying a winning streak for Hugos and Nebulas of late, with *Ender's Game* and *Speaker for the Dead*. But he also won the World Fantasy Award last year for a novelette, "Hatrack River," which forms the first five chapters of *Seventh Son*.

I am not convinced that "Hatrack River" worked all that well as a novelette, but it does form the prologue to what looks like is going to be a substantial American fantasy.

"Hatrack River" tells the story of the birth of a miraculous child, how even nature itself is perturbed at his auspicious entry into the world, and the great forces of light and darkness that gather around him to influence his life one way or the other in preparation for some final conflict. In the hero's birth is the seed of his own destruction. Somebody knows a secret as all-important as the giant's heart in the fairy tale, which was buried under a tree and kept the giant invincible as long as nobody dug it up.

### RATING SYSTEM

☆☆☆☆  
☆☆☆  
☆☆  
☆

Outstanding  
Very good  
Good  
Fair  
Poor

Further, there are a variety of apparitions as the child's miraculous powers develop. He has a mysterious, Gandalfian wanderer of a mentor. He falls in with a wizard who bears him up into a whirlwind so that he might see the future. All the while the boy struggles to be worthy of his destiny while remaining aware of his limitation: earth, air, and fire will support him, but water is his enemy.

Such a plot could easily fit into a *Lord of the Rings* clone, with the standard setting: medieval never-never land, with princesses, dragons, castles, and the like.

But, who says such a story must be set in a fake medieval Europe?

It doesn't. Card's epic takes place in America in the early nineteenth century. Where previous fantasists have given us a Europe that never was, Card gives us an America that never was.

The results are interesting. Card's world is one that differs subtly from our own. History has begun to diverge. The date at the outset is (counting the hero's age backwards from the battle of Tippecanoe, which occurs in volume II) about 1802. England still has a Lord Protector, but there are Cavalier duchies in the American South. The American Revolution has fizzled, leaving the lands east of the Mississippi a patchwork of tiny nations: New England, the United States, Appalachee, and several unattached territories. Canada is still in the hands of the Royalist French, and the assistant commander of the French forces in Detroit is one Napoleon Bonaparte.

All this is ordinary enough alternate history. But where most writers would give us a realistic story set within such a framework, Card moves into supernaturalism, myth, and, yes, true epic.

It works. The alternate American setting is just far enough removed from historical reality that we can accept magic and the kind of magical story Card is telling. Had this been set in generic fantasy-land, it would

have lost a certain immediacy. Had it been set in the real American past, Card would have been seriously hampered. His tale can't follow history very closely.

*Seventh Son* is very much an origin story of the miraculous Alvin Miller, the seventh son of a seventh son, who is born with powers that are miraculous even by the standards of a community where everyone has a certain magical "knack." He must be shaped for good before he becomes an instrument of evil. Much danger is hanging over him. He is clearly, as the protagonist of a proper epic should be, Someone Important, but he doesn't know it yet.

In *Red Prophet*, Card makes fuller use of his uniquely American subject matter. The crux of the conflict here is the death of the land itself. To the Indians, the land is alive, and men live in careful balance with the Earth. To the Whites, the land is to be cleared and ploughed and sown. Card ably captures the point of view of the Indians' shamanistic religion: the Indians draw supernatural power from the land. As the Whites invade, that power fades.

Enter numerous historical characters: Alvin heals, then becomes the apprentice of the Indian known to history as the Shawnee Prophet, who began a movement (actually led by his brother Tecumseh — whom Card calls *Ta-Kumsaw*) to drive the Whites from the land forever. But William Henry Harrison fought them to a draw at Tippecanoe, and the Indian movement collapsed. Harrison used the victory to catapult himself into the White House with the memorable slogan "Tippecanoe and Tyler too!"

That's what happened in our history. Card alters the events and the characters of the participants. His Prophet is much more of a pacifist than the real one was. His Harrison is one of the most black-hearted scoundrels to appear in recent fiction. Alvin, foreseeing catastrophe, struggles to find some alternative to slaughter. He, like Ender Wiggin in *Ender's Game*, is forced to grow up very fast and bear all the

world's pain and guilt. As the story becomes more overtly allegorical, Alvin is very much the crucified savior — but without any certain hope of salvation. At the end of the second book there has been much suffering, and there is a lot of guilt to go around, but there is no clear resolution.

The Indians get massacred at Tippecanoe. Harrison departs under a curse and will never be president, though he might, someday, expiate his guilt. The Prophet withdraws the tribes across the Mississippi, but this is at best a temporary solution. And we shall be hearing more of Alvin, and I doubt he'll have an easy time of it.

Card has impressively woven an epic fantasy out of the American past. The conflict between the White man's world and the Red grabs hold of our emotions. It's a lot more substantial than the usual battle of Light and Darkness.

Because Card is a more sophisticated writer than many, his conflict isn't as simple as Light vs. Dark anyway. He is a moralist, aware that good and evil reside in all of us. His good and his evil are all the more convincing because they are ambiguous. This is, I think, the real strength of the series. It is not a cartoon. It is about something as important and as complex as life itself.

His other great strength is characterization. All the major characters come alive. They are real, memorable people.

His weakness is style. Card is at best an adequate wordsmith, and his dialogue in particular is sometimes wooden. Some of the descriptions are simply not as vivid, as luxuriant as they should be. Worse yet, he frequently attempts rusticisms, the kind that would add flavor to the telling in a first-person narrative, but that are merely obtrusive and Dear-Readering in third. ("She gave no never mind to the chicken drips. After all, when folk with babies stayed in the roadhouse, Mama never even crinkled her face at the most spectackler diapers.")

But you get used to it after a while, and don't give it no never

mind, because this is a fantasy with a heart. It's *about something*. And it isn't like the last dozen fantasy series you might have read.

It does seem to be at least a trilogy, though.

Rating (for both volumes):

☆☆☆

## Stephen King and Science Fiction

### *The Tommyknockers*

By Stephen King  
Putnam  
558 pp., \$19.95

Stephen King has been a science fiction writer for quite some time. Because of the way books get pigeonholed in this country, I am sure some of you haven't noticed. King's books are *packaged* as horror, every last one of them, be they supernatural or realistic suspense or epic fantasy or science fiction. I am sure that if King wrote a romantic comedy it would be made to look *sinister* in book form.

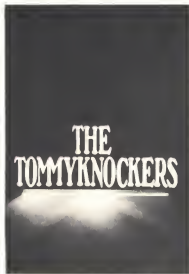
His science fiction includes a variety of stories about ESPers, including *Carrie*, *The Dead Zone*, and *Firestarter*; two future dystopias, *The Running Man* and *The Long Walk* (the latter also partaking of the SF convention of the alternate history); a couple of interplanetaries ("The Jaunt" and "Beachworld") and a variety of stories about scientifically produced monstrosities invading the here and now, most notably "The Mist."

The difference between King's SF and what you might find in, say, *Analog*, is that his is a lot less comforting. Authority figures are seldom good guys. His characters are just ordinary people trying to survive, very far removed from the "competent man" tradition fostered by John Campbell.

While I could not imagine King ever having sold anything to Campbell, there's nothing in his *subject* matter that would have ruled him out. *Carrie*, as a novelette in a 1950s *Astounding*, would have been about a conspiracy of psychically talented "witches" (who've passed their lore

on from mother to daughter) who must band together, possibly with the help of some secret government agency, to stop the rogue ESPer Carrie White from destroying this small town in Maine, blowing everyone's cover and setting off an anti-psigrom.

But King writes to a quite different set of conventions. The *structure* of one of his novels is certainly that of the horror novel, or of the best-seller disaster



novel. And his attitudes would have gotten him kicked out of *Analog* real fast. For King, government folks are almost always murderous scum. And King is the most clearly anti-science writer to come along in decades. He is everything Ray Bradbury was once accused of being. In *The Stand* he laid it all out plainly: *At the end of rationality is the mass grave.*

But he remains a fine storyteller. Within the fairly narrow range of stories about contemporary people dealing with the fantastic, he is nearly unsurpassed.

*The Tommyknockers* is about a woman who discovers a huge, ancient spaceship buried in her backyard. It is still inhabited—sort of. Before you can say "Invasion of the Body Snatchers," the people in a small Maine town begin to change. They build fantastic gadgets out of ordinary materials. They become telepathic, joining into a group mind. They undergo physical change,

then deterioration, all the while laboring to unearth the ship and hide the truth from the outside world.

The Tommyknockers of the title are creatures from a sinister children's rhyme, vaguely defined ghosts or ogres. The Tommyknockers inhabiting the *Queen Mary*-sized flying saucer are (perhaps) disembodied psychic parasites, who deliberately crashed on Earth 250,000 years ago when their old hosts were wearing out. Now they ruthlessly take over the townspeople until they can regenerate themselves and leave. Think of them as a slightly more individualistic version of Lovecraft's "Colour Out of Space."

All King's familiar techniques come to bear. Some of them are, surprisingly, tired. There are dull stretches in this book, particularly toward the beginning, and there's even an important sequence that is botched because we're not sure if a character is blowing herself up out of heroic self-sacrifice to alert the outside world, or because her death is part of some obscure alien design. Occasionally, logic lapses. (If Tommyknockers lose all their teeth, how does one advanced case go about calmly chewing peanut butter and cracker sandwiches? More seriously, one dead character flashes back a "Use the force, Luke" message to the hero at a crucial moment, with no rationale at all.)

On the plus side, once the story gets moving, it roars along in the usual gut-grabbing manner. You may well read three hundred pages of this thing in one sitting. The characterizations range from adequate to very good. There are even surprising moments of satirical comedy, as in the positively explosive encounter between the drunken poet and the world of academe. (This same poet, through much loss and suffering, rises to the role of hero by the time the book is done.)

*The Tommyknockers* takes a while to jell, but when it does, it's a great page-turner. It works splendidly on a *what happens*



next basis. Much is forgiven.

Rating: ☆☆☆

## This is Tuesday, It Must Be Rondua

*Bones of the Moon*  
By Jonathan Carroll  
Arbor House, 1987  
217 pp., \$15.95

This is a book I was genuinely looking forward to, as I have become converted to the works of Jonathan Carroll. I owe my conversion mostly to Edna Stumpf, whose article on Carroll in my *Discovering Modern Horror Fiction* piqued my interest. Before that, I had vaguely heard about this wonderful book, *The Land of Laughs*, which came out in the mainstream, vanished as most fantasies published as mainstream do, only to be rescued by loyal fans who bought up the remainders and shoved them into the hands of editors until someone (Ace) reprinted the thing as fantasy. Since then, Carroll has been building a following.

It's no surprise either. He is arguably the greatest supernatural horror writer living, mostly on the basis of a single book, even though his second novel, *The Voice of Our Shadow* (which has not yet been paperbacked), is no mean accomplishment either.

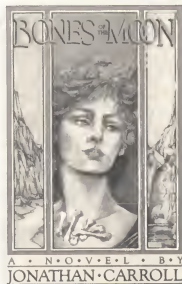
If Philip K. Dick and Franz Kafka had collaborated to write the works of L. Frank Baum, the result might have come out like *The Land of Laughs*. And somewhere along the way, I think they absorbed much advice from M.R. James on the art of the proper ghost story.

*Bones of the Moon* resembles Carroll's earlier work to the point that if he writes a couple more like this, his limitations will start to show. But for the time being, each book is unique and wonderful, even though they are all of a type. All Carroll's novels are about sensitive, emotionally repressed people whose worst nightmares intrude into reality.

For Cullen James, the narrator of *Bones of the Moon*, the nightmares begin as pleasant dreams of a Baum-esque fantasy world called Rondua. The dreams

run in sequence, as if she is periodically visiting a real place. But darkness hovers, as it becomes clear that in some previous, unremembered visit she failed on a crucial mission and caused an appalling disaster. Now, in the company of a son she doesn't have in the waking world, she must complete the quest. Slowly, elements of the Ronduan dream begin to invade her waking life, while life invades Rondua — guilt over an abortion, the unwanted amours of an eccentric movie director, the even more unwanted attention of the now institutionalized homicidal maniac who used to live in the apartment downstairs.

Carroll is a superb writer, an



extremely polished stylist with an exquisite sense of character and tone. He can be warm, witty, or terrifying as he chooses. He has a striking visual sense, as he creates the dream-world out of commonplace images. Rondua is not a standard mock-medieval fantasy land. It is instead the true stuff of dreams, bits and pieces of waking life exaggerated and jumbled together. Its only logic is that of the subconscious, but that is logic indeed.

Imagine *Yellow Submarine* in live-action as serious drama and you will begin to get the idea.

For example, when Cullen and her son Pepsi are near the end of their quest for the fifth Bone of the Moon, they walk alone

past the Dead Handwriting across a plain of glass. They have lost their companions, notably a wise, huge dog named Mr. Tracy, whose leg was bitten off by a sinister camel. Beyond the Dead Handwriting lie the dread Hot Shoes:

*The bottle-glass path turned a sharp corner and directly ahead were six glowing orange shoes, two storeys high at the very least. They were men's Oxford shoes and were connected to tweed-covered legs as thick and as high as California redwood trees that climbed up and through the clouds.*

Things soon get much nastier. In the end, it doesn't matter what is dream and what is "real." The two dovetail together perfectly.

The ending is, however, rushed. What we have here is a 217-page book that remains utterly brilliant for 210 pages. Then things are over too easily, too quickly. The cavalry comes to the rescue. At the very end, Carroll's sure mastery of his story slipped. He has had this problem before. Few people seem satisfied with the ending of *The Voice of Our Shadow*.

But before those last seven pages, *Bones of the Moon* is a flawless, breathtakingly original performance.

Rating: ☆☆☆½

## Noted:

*New Destinies, Vol. II*  
Edited by Jim Baen  
Baen Books, 1987  
232 pp., \$2.95

*New Destinies* is a continuation/revival of Jim Baen's old *Destinies* series. Readers by now know what to expect. This is the series that out-Analogs *Analog*.

But, alas, the fall 1987 number is easily the weakest yet. It is about half non-fiction, with a strongly political slant. "The Phobos Race," by Donald Frederick Robertson, gives a glimpse of what may be the coming space race — the study of Mars from a base on Phobos.

"Running Out," by Charles Sheffield, explores the state of the world's resources and comes to some (slightly) surprising conclusions. "Was Frankenstein Simply Einstein Being Frank," by Gregory Benford, surveys the image of the scientist in science fiction.

The fiction, alas, is not much to write home about. "Moondo Bizarro," by Phillip C. Jennings, manages to create a record number of strange societies in a short space, but there is very little story. It's mostly lecture/exposition in the finest Gernsbackian tradition. "The Irvhank Effect" is a rudimentary number about two guys who discover a radiation damper that can put an

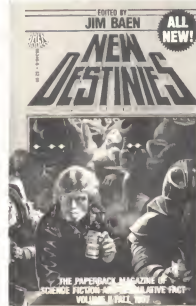
**Cycles of Fire**  
By William K. Hartmann  
and Ron Miller  
Workman Publishing, 1987  
189 pp., \$14.95

Nonfiction. This is, strictly speaking, an astronomy text, but a decidedly speculative one, profusely illustrated with paintings by both Hartmann and Miller showing dozens of vistas no human eye has ever seen: planets of strange star systems, globular clusters in planetary skies, black holes, planetary collisions, etc. The text (by Hartmann) will certainly stimulate the scientific imagination. It's great stuff for you would-be hard science fiction



writers out there. The art itself is splendid, in the finest Bonestellian tradition of astronomical art.

Recommended.  
Rating: ★★★★★  
— ABO —



end to the arms race — and why lots of people don't want the arms race to end. "The Dreaming Spires of Houston" pastiches Kipling (who wrote a similar story about ships) and is no more than an overheard conversation among various rockets rusting away as they bemoan the state of the American space program. The key story of the issue is a novella of computer espionage and alien contact, "Poppa Was a Catcher," by Steven Gould. It is — almost — interesting, filled with good ideas, but never coming to life. If we can't care about the characters, it hardly matters how clever their tech-talk is.

A disappointing volume.  
Rating: ★  
PAGE 18

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**SCIENCE FICTION CHRONICLE**  
**P.O. Box 4175A**  
**New York NY 10163, usa**

March/April 1988

## EDITOR'S NOTES

By Charles C. Ryan

# Baggies



The response to our conversion to a full-color, full-slick format has been overwhelming. We've received far too many letters and notes to print, but we'll get as many as we can in this issue and the next, so don't stop booming our boomerangs.

In keeping with our game plan and long-term goals, we have added one more upgrade for this issue — baggies! From now on, all subscription copies of *Aboriginal Science Fiction* will be mailed in a clear plastic bag with a "second-class" postage indicia printed on the plastic. This isn't news to you if you're a subscriber, of course, since you had to tear open the plastic bag to read this. But it is something we thought potential subscribers would like to know.

We were a bit frustrated at how poorly copies of issue 8 traveled through the mail. Ever since our first issue, we have received notes, queries, demands and even threats suggesting that we wrap, bag, bundle or otherwise protect the magazine from the fold, spindle and mutilation of the mails. Others have suggested we try the gummy glue used by some labeling machines, which allows the mailing label to be peeled off the cover without damaging the art underneath. Most said they "would happily pay more" if we took the appropriate step. (In fact, Harlan Ellison was one of those berating me for messing up his perfectly collectible magazines with a label. He was nice about it, but I could hear him clearly from California and he wasn't using a telephone.)

Unfortunately, we weren't able to do much but sigh in agreement — for two reasons. First, our previous printer was not equipped to do either of those options; and second, like everything else, such things cost money. We have been very careful to make sure that *ABO* has not overextended itself. We're little guys and don't have the resources of Time Inc. or Rupert Murdoch. The most important item on our agenda was to make certain we kept publishing.

That is a certainty now. I suspect we are going to be around for a long, long time.

But, as I mentioned, all these changes cost money. We have recently been notified of the third price increase for paper and printing since we started the magazine. Add to that the additional cost of printing full-color,

full-slick and now, the baggy, and you may understand why we have been forced to increase our rates. (Which just shows how smart those of you were who subscribed for 18 issues or renewed early.)

The cover price, which we upped in January, will stay at \$3. The new subscription rates are \$14 for 6 issues, \$24 for 12 issues, and \$32 for 18 issues. The renewal rate will be the same — unless you self-renew early. The early, self-renewal rate will be \$12 for 6 issues, \$22 for 12 issues, and \$30 for 18 issues, so it still pays to take the initiative.

One or two people have expressed disappointment that we converted from our earlier "pulp" format. We've been accused, in a friendly manner, of breaking tradition.

That's not how I see it. Instead of breaking the old tradition, we've created a new one — a tradition that will set the standard by which SF magazines will be judged in the future. Full color, full slick.

Now for the "Oops!" category. November, December and the first few weeks of January were very intense and exhausting. We accomplished a lot. All that work, and the accompanying fatigue, however, lead to a couple of screw-ups. A piece

of correction copy was put down in the wrong place in the "Aborigines" section, the wrong kind of tape was used for several last minute paste-ins, blurring them, and we ran out of space. As the space narrowed down to the last few inches, a poem written by Bonita Kale scheduled for the issue was bumped — only I forgot to also remove her mention from the "Aborigines" column. Sorry.

As punishment, I am forfeiting the rest of my column and giving the space to Bonita for her poem. So I'll say bye for now until the next issue.

A small P.S. to those subscribers who have ordered back issues. Please be patient, we are getting them out as fast as we can. The supply is getting very low, but we have the amount calculated to last through the number of orders we expect.

BONITA KALE is the author of "From A New World."

She has three children 16, 13 and 9 years of age, and she once sold an article entitled "Living with Preschoolers."

She has a short story, "A Speaking Likeness," scheduled for an upcoming issue of *ABO* and has a children's book making the rounds of publishers. This is her first SF sale.

— ABO —

## From A New World

By Bonita Kale

*These seas never made our blood.  
These tides are strangers, the life they bear  
no kin of ours. No jellied cousin  
greet us; no long-lost uncle shows  
his teeth. Not sea, not land, not sky  
can say, "We knew you when." At night  
we search for Sol's remembered day.  
"There!" The children stare,  
and twist away. How can they care  
for distant stars? In heartless play  
they dare the waves, and lordly stand,  
digging footprints in alien sand.*

— ABO —



## FROM THE BOOKSHELF

By Janice M. Eisen

# Near and Far Futures

### *Mercedes Nights*

By Michael D. Weaver  
St. Martin's, 1987  
240 pp., \$16.95

This is an excellent novel: suspenseful, well-written, and compelling. It is set in a brilliantly realized near future world.

*Mercedes Night* is a famous, sexy video star whose life is turned upside down when an outlaw cloning operation starts selling clones of her as sex toys. The situation is complicated by her clandestine affair with a presidential candidate who has powerful enemies. When some of the clones achieve self-awareness, things really start to cook....

It's a convoluted plot — intrigue, murder, politics, sex — but it never becomes confusing. Weaver keeps it under control. *Mercedes Nights* is a serious novel, but it has lots of humor, too.

The main character is terrific — well-drawn and clearly focused. The other characters are also very good, especially the computer nerd who creates true artificial intelligence and the schizophrenic who believes man is destined to transform into "vacuum fish."

The characters, the plot, and the world are all very believable. There are one or two loose ends, but on the whole the ending is very satisfying. The subplots fit together well. At the end

everything comes together and makes sense. Weaver deserves a round of applause.

Rating: ☆☆☆



### *Wild Cards III: Jokers Wild*

Edited by George R.R. Martin  
Bantam/Spectra, 1987  
384 pp., \$3.95

I'm not usually partial to shared worlds, but the "Wild Cards" series is an exception. The premise is that an alien virus was released over New York City just after World War II, causing many deaths and creating two special classes of people: Jokers, who were deformed, often grotesquely, and Aces, who have superpowers.

The participating authors had a lot of fun rewriting recent American history to include these "Wild Cards" — for example, Joseph McCarthy's hearings focused not on Communist sympathizers but on Aces. The third book requires a lot of background knowledge; don't try to read it if

you haven't read at least the first book, and preferably the second as well.

The first anthology consisted of related but independent stories, while the stories in the second joined together to form a narrative. This third book, which bills itself as a "mosaic novel," has taken that process one step further: it is a continuous narrative, with different authors writing the sections that focus on the particular characters they have created. It's an interesting, if not altogether successful, experiment, but I found the book less satisfying than the previous two.

One problem is that the plot is much more comic-bookish. While the first book concentrated on the Aces and Jokers and their interactions with "normal" society, this one depicts superheroes fighting a supervillain (the Astronomer), continuing a battle that was begun in the second book. I'm not a comics reader, and I found this story much less involving than the best stories in the first book.

While the subplots are less comic-bookish, they are also much less interesting than the main plot. One of them has two major flaws: an idiot plot — characters fail to look at a particular object they are trying to get hold of, though logically they should; and cheating — the viewpoint character knows a vital fact about this object but never thinks about it when the reader can "hear."

In the previous books, each contribution focused on one character's story, but this novel concentrates on telling the story of the battle against the

### RATING SYSTEM

☆☆☆☆☆	Outstanding
☆☆☆☆	Very good
☆☆☆	Good
☆☆	Fair
☆	Poor



Astronomer, so less time is spent on character. We don't learn enough about the characters new to this volume.

The "mosaic novel" fits together well enough, but it has some important problems. Bringing the characters from the different strands together requires several improbable coincidences. Also, not all the individual resolutions of the various plot threads are satisfying. The contributions of Lewis Shiner, George R.R. Martin, and Melinda Snodgrass are very good; Edward Bryant's is also good but nearly vanishes during the course of the book.

Despite these flaws, the book is well-written and suspenseful, and a good read. I recommend it

disease, and the main characters must track down and stop a genocidal plot, through webs of violence and espionage.

The characters are very good, well-rounded despite their somewhat conventional roles. The plot is interesting, the politics are portrayed well, and the action moves along. It's not quite as suspenseful as it ought to be, because, with this sort of book, you know how the ending will come out, but I was drawn in nevertheless. I do wish there had been more explanation of the motives of the villains.

The authors have created a very well-realized near future, with lots of good details. The world is believable and solid. I

Tor, 1987  
306 pp., \$3.50

Hayford Peirce's first novel is a well-written, enjoyable romp. A con man known as the MacNair of MacNair accidentally comes into possession of a diamond-encrusted religious device and is then transported into an alternate world in which Napoleon was never defeated and British and German scientists are plotting to destroy the empire he established. There's a great deal of confusion and running around, false identities, politics and espionage. The confusion is abetted by a duplicate MacNair from this alternate world.

There are a few problems



to those who enjoyed the previous books.

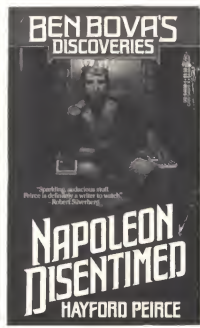
Rating: ☆☆☆

#### *Kill Ratio*

By Janet Morris and David Drake  
Ace, 1987  
268 pp. \$3.50

I didn't expect to like this book. It didn't look promising, and the authors, particularly Drake, are famed for a kind of military SF I dislike. Much to my surprise, I enjoyed *Kill Ratio*.

Most of the book takes place on the Moon, the location of UN headquarters. There is a sudden rash of mysterious deaths, apparently from an unknown



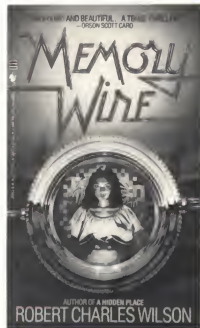
particularly liked the idea of the Afrikaners, after a black takeover in South Africa, as a pariah group. I also appreciate the terrorists being counter to stereotype.

Near the end, the book gets a little silly, with a sadistic Afrikaner torturer ("we haff ways of makink you talk"), and it degenerates into action and bang-bang instead of strategy and detective work. But it's still a good read, and better written than most action-adventure novels.

Rating: ☆☆☆

*Napoleon Disentimed*  
By Hayford Peirce

March/April 1988



with the plot. The MacNair does some things he's too smart to do, and I'm dubious about the existence of his doppelganger in an alternate history that's so different in other ways. I also hate footnotes in a novel (well, there are only three).

In general, the book is fun to read, though the MacNair's pretensions can get somewhat tiresome. Unfortunately, I found the ending predictable as hell, and it left one or two issues unresolved. But Peirce has a good touch for this kind of light SF, and I enjoyed the novel.

Rating: ☆☆☆

**Memory Wire**  
By Robert Charles Wilson  
Bantam/Spectra, 1988  
224 pp., \$3.50

A common theme in SF is humanity's receipt of a gift of knowledge from the stars, often leading to a paradise on Earth. Less common are thoughtful examinations of what effect such a longed-for gift might really have on our world.

In *Memory Wire*, an ancient extraterrestrial mineral deposit has been found. These oneirooliths ("dreamstones") contain vast amounts of information when decoded, but they also have strange effects on human memory, leading to their use as a drug.



The three protagonists are attempting to smuggle one of these stones out from under the nose of the military. The main character is an "Angel": wires in his brain lead to a memory chip, so that everything he sees and hears is recorded, as if by a camera.

Wilson has depicted a gritty, unpleasant, and believable near future. The characterization is excellent, although not enough time is spent on one of the three main characters, and he is thus the least comprehensible of them.

Unfortunately, the author has created a problem for himself with the character of the Angel. His whole philosophy of life, his "Angel Zen," is to cut himself off

from all feeling and emotion, to be the "perfect mirror." This makes it hard for the reader to empathize with him, and that lack of empathy left me feeling a bit empty and unsatisfied.

Nonetheless, the novel is exciting and compelling. I recommend it.

Rating: ☆☆☆½

**The Kindly Ones**  
By Melissa Scott  
Baen, 1987  
371 pp., \$2.95

More than 1,400 years before this novel begins, a colony ship was forced by a mutiny to land on Orestes, a world much colder and harsher than its intended destination. In order to survive, the colonists created a complex, strict social code based on kinship, the penalty for violation of which was death.

As time passed, the code remained, but physical death was replaced by a social "death." The living pretend to be completely unaware of the socially dead, known as "ghosts," who function in their own, separate world. But now Orestes has been contacted by the rest of humanity, and the code is beginning to crack under the stress.

Melissa Scott has created a fascinating world and culture, and filled it with believable characters and an involving story. The many details she includes ring true and really make Orestes live for the reader. The ending of the novel grows inevitably out of the situation she constructed, and yet I did not expect it. ("The Kindly Ones," by the way, was a Greek euphemism for the Furies, who avenged crimes, especially those against kinship.)

The book's flaws are relatively minor. The actions of the character Guil near the end would have been more understandable if the reader had seen more of her. The sex of the main character is, apparently deliberately, left unstated, and I found this an annoying trick. My interest flagged only once, during a long, excruciatingly detailed flight between worlds near the end — a particularly bad spot

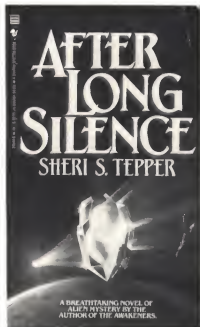
because suspense was building.

I like the reader's feeling of ambivalence about many of the events of the story. All in all, *The Kindly Ones* is an absorbing book.

Rating: ☆☆☆

**After Long Silence**  
By Sheri S. Tepper  
Bantam/Spectra, 1987  
352 pp., \$3.95

It seems likely that many aliens encountered by spacefaring humans will not be easily recognizable as intelligent life. Sheri Tepper has used that idea to create an enjoyable and fascinating novel. *After Long Silence* features wondrous, unique aliens, an involving story,



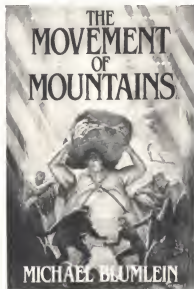
and appealing, well-drawn protagonists.

Life on the planet Jubal is dominated by the Presences, huge crystalline structures which vibrate in response to the slightest noise. Their vibrations kill anyone who tries to pass them unless the Presence is first quieted with a Password — a song that is unique to each presence. The songs are discovered by Explorers, and arranged and performed by Tripsingers. In the novel, an alliance of Explorers and Tripsingers must fight commercial interests and try to communicate with the Presences.

The book's main problem is the villains: they are too

villainous. Not only are they greedy and indifferent to the lives of others, but they're sadists, perverts, murderers, rapists, and grotesque-looking to boot (we might call this the Harkonnen Effect). When the villains are so overdrawn, they become caricatures and pull the reader out of the novel.

Tepper's also started up too many subplots; they distract from the main story. That story is very good, and the characterization of the good guys is excellent. I love the idea of the book and the world Tepper has created; she portrays the conflicting agendas of different characters well. Tepper is definitely an author to watch. She just needs to make her black hats three-



dimensional and less overstated.

Rating: ☆☆½

Isaac Asimov's *Robot City*, Book 3: *Cyborg*

By William F. Wu  
Ace, 1987  
169 pp. \$2.95

Recent months have seen the debut of a number of "packaged" or "franchised" series, where a well-known author licenses a universe he has created and less-well-known authors write novels set in it. I don't like the idea, but it would be worthwhile if it gave authors who might not otherwise get published a chance to shine.

I picked up this novel because

I've been impressed with William Wu's other work. There's little evidence of his presence; *Cyborg* reads as if it were written by computer.

This is the third book in the *Robot City* series, but the previous books are not essential to understanding it. The plot is really a '40s short story padded out to the novel length. Like Asimov's classic robot stories, it is a puzzle: how do you find a cyborg who looks just like the robots he's hiding among?

The execution of the solution to the puzzle is well done. The characters' other problem — how they can get off the world they're stranded on — is really a false one; we know they won't leave the planet since the series continues.

*Cyborg* is essentially a juvenile novel, though it doesn't indicate this anywhere and the back cover implies that the characters are adults. The protagonists are all in late adolescence, no profanity is used (the characters' expletive is "frost"), and there's no sex beyond a chaste kiss or two. The characters Wu was handed are cardboard, and they don't always react the way they rationally would.

The book's a quick read, and children might enjoy it, but it seems a waste of William Wu's time and talent.

Rating: ☆☆

*The Movement of Mountains*

By Michael Blumlein  
St. Martin's, 1987  
289 pp., \$17.95

*The Movement of Mountains* is a weird book — interesting, ambitious, and brilliant in spots. It is not completely successful, but it's very good, and utterly original.

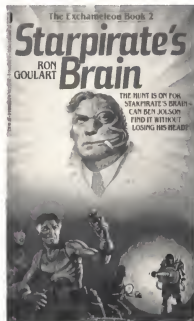
Blumlein's main character is unique: an intelligent, excitable, incredibly gluttonous doctor. He leaves an Earth increasingly divided between rich and poor, following his lover to a world where an essential drug is mined by genetically engineered slaves. His solutions to the ethical dilemmas he encounters are

sometimes shocking, but always believable.

The book is set in a fascinating environment, and Blumlein describes it very well. The main character is rich, different, interesting, and credible, the others somewhat less so. What we see of Earth is intriguing, but we don't see enough of it to truly appreciate the ending.

After the death of one of the main characters, everything winds up too fast, becoming confusing, and the ending is so quick that it's not quite satisfying. The narrator's writing style is somewhat mannered, which, though appropriate to the character, can be tiresome at times.

This unusual novel deserves a



wider audience, and I look forward to seeing more of Blumlein's work.

Rating: ☆☆½

*Starpirate's Brain*

By Ron Goulart  
St. Martin's, 1987  
184 pp., \$2.95

This book is the second in a new series about Ben Jolson, a character from Goulart's old Chameleon Corps stories, but all the knowledge a reader needs is provided (somewhat clumsily) in the first few chapters. Jolson, like other Chameleon Corps agents,

(Continued to page 51)

# Sunshine Delight

By Paul Edwards

Art by Leslie Pardew

Maud Hampton had made it two thirds of the way across the street when, as always, the light changed. But it was during a rare lull in the electric traffic, so she didn't have to run, risking her brittle hips against the likelihood of falling on the asphalt. It was better back when most of the cars and trucks used gas. The air might have been worse, but at least you could hear them coming. Not that her hearing was bad. No, it was still pretty good for age seventy-three. And her eyes, too, thank God. They hadn't changed her prescription in years. When the conversation at the home got too boring, she could escape through reading.

Maud stepped up to the sidewalk, balancing with one hand on her umbrella, the other clutching the new edition of *Ellery Queen's*, another constant in the swirling world of continual wars, horrid youth music, constantly changing architecture, constantly increasing inner-city danger. Maud's collection reached back twenty years or more ... probably worth something if she ever really needed some extra money, which was unlikely with the pension, her savings, and the NatMedPlan. She stopped to catch her breath. None of that tightness from breathing old gas engine fumes. The second decade of the twenty-first century couldn't be that bad if they'd finally managed to clean up the air.

Suddenly, the low-pitched harmonious whine of an eighteen-wheeler emerged from the ordinary hum of traffic to pierce all the other city noises. The massive truck raced down the thoroughfare. Maud barely had time to turn away as the corrugated aluminum walls sliced past her, inches away, followed by an intense buffet of wind. She was knocked off balance, and spun around into the crowd of pedestrians, her hands outstretched, wrists ready to break in the inevitable fall to the cracked concrete.

Strong fists encircled her upper arms and she felt herself being stood up as though she were a vase that had toppled off an end table. She looked up to thank her rescuer and gasped.

His black hair had been shaved at the front and layered in a long mane at the back, and he had last shaved his face two or three days ago. His shoulders, immense domes of muscle ripping through the sleeves of his Levi jacket, bore the stylized "NA" tattoo — New Army. The eyes of a sick reptile stared unmoving from the gaunt face. A repulsive fume of stale tobacco and stale beer roiled from his grim mouth, which twitched and shivered, revealing the presence of an active cerebral communications module.

"Don't hurt yourself, lady," came the dulled

monotone from far away.

"No, I won't, I ... thank you, thank you, Mister, Mister...." She felt her pulse hammering in her neck.

"Sparkhead."

The sound of it jarred her. "Thank you, Mr. Sparkhead. I ... I've got to go, I've...."

He dropped his hands to his sides and turned away, the dead-center gaze never wavering. In spite of his hair, Maud could see the swelling at the back of his neck where the CCM had been implanted. Sparkhead moved into the crowd and disappeared.

Discovering she had been holding her breath, Maud sighed noisily, caught her wind, and tripped away from danger. *They shouldn't let people like that out on the street!* she thought. Morton's was only a half block away, but it took her ten minutes to get there, stopping every few steps. *I'm shaking like a leaf!* she thought. *How foolish of me.*

Hot, always so hot in Greater Phoenix. At least there were safe places like Morton's Delicatessen, for decades an island of sanity in the tremoring madness of modern life, a place of good smells, noisy air conditioning (that worked!), vinyl seats and Formica tables, waitresses who remembered you from one visit to the next. The deli was a haven of familiarity, safe from the sleepless danger of the violent ones. The successive infestations of dope peddlers, gun sellers, and electromusicians had found fashionable new hives, leaving unchanged the friendly atmosphere, fresh bagels and knishes, lox priced reasonable — the essence of Morton's.

Lunch hour: Morton's was full.

"Hi, Mrs. Hampton. You're here early! I don't know if we've got any seats in non left."

"That's all right, dear. If you had a booth in smoking, that would be—"

The girl pushed into the crowded darkness, returning a moment later: "There's just one booth left."

"Thanks, dear," Maud said, her voice lost in the bustle to get to the end of the restaurant.

A short, knobby brown glass of ice water slid an inch on a wet ring. A porcelain clack on the table distracted her from the menu she had memorized years ago.

"Coffee?" A girl who didn't know her. Well, she didn't usually eat in this section.

"Yes, caf please, dear." Reading the menu, she added, "Just a hard roll and some butter," but looking up, she discovered that the girl had gone.

Voices from the next booth interrupted her private tirade on modern manners.





Zip  
Sars

TAXI

TAXI

BEER

"I'm telling you, man, seven complete Units, all four wires intact. We could turn 'em for three grand apiece installed, easy!"

A darker, more urbane voice replied, "Using that wine-sodden butcher to do implants ... it's immoral to take people's money for services and then kill them. Besides, who's desperate enough to permit *him* to stick wires into their heads?"

"No, no, we keep him in the back. Nobody has to see him. I'll keep him sober, there's no problem there."

"I don't like it."

"Mark the Shark got two grand apiece in 'Troit for two wire jobs with no guarantees. Three deaths to get it right, and the wiseguys were linin' up outside."

"Hmm. Then we could get five, at least."

"At least!"

"Theodore, if you can keep the good doctor sober, and if you can screen the applicants *carefully*, then you may proceed."

"Thanks, chief!"

"Thirty-five hundred for me, fifteen for you. Use the Pan Southwest Warehouse. The word will be: 'It's raining dogs and cats.' I expect this whole business to be concluded by next Thursday."

There was a sound of dishes bouncing on Formica, followed by a change in the voice's position. Maud quietly opened her magazine and bent over it. Her table jumped; she looked up.

A big man in a blue suit two sizes too small looked down. "Oh, excuse me, Ma'am," he said. "Didn't mean to bump into you."

She smiled her sunniest. "No harm done, young man." She enjoyed watching him preen. Middle-aged men always preened when she called them "young." It didn't stop him from glancing nervously at the table from which he had come. He stammered for a moment, then left.

She missed seeing the face of the man whom Theodore had been importuning, pretending to concentrate on her magazine. *Those were gangsters!* she kept telling herself, *selling those things the New Army veterans have in their heads!*

The tabloids and news weeklies had all published their exposes of the supposed "subcutaneous radios." Who didn't know that the Units turned the rawest recruits into New Army warriors — scary, bold, and fearless? Who didn't know that the Units were the weapon with which the New Army had won the Warsaw War? Who didn't know that the rise in violent crime went hand-in-hand with the small percentage of soldiers returning with malfunctioning Units, Units that could never be removed without destroying the mind? These strange people gravitated toward the megalopolitan central districts, where life was energetic, lodging cheap, and drugs to numb the persistent ache of continual cerebral stimulus were available for a pittance; where the weird charisma of their electropathic personalities had generated a new lifestyle in neon-lit squalor and bizarre impulsive excess.

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The sun had long since set, but the residents of Sunshine Delight remained at the front windows, ig-

noring the ancient LP of Country Joe and the Fish. Their spotted, ropy hands trembled as they pushed droopy curtains away from sash windows, trying to catch a peek of Hattie Tyler tottering through the darkness toward home. Hours of waiting.... Even the babblings of the senile ones had wound down into fearful silence. How bitter the inescapable truth that crushed their private hopes: the lawless violence of the central city had fed again.

"I get the shotgun," croaked a Nordic voice.

"Lars," said Maud. She knew he didn't own a gun.

"I get the shotgun, go out and shoot all those New Army sleaze-balls!" But the touch of Maud's hand quieted his impotent rage before it could consume him.

"I'll call the police again." Maud pushed the emergency button without much enthusiasm. She knew what the sergeant would say. It was always the same. When did she leave, where was she going, is there a place we could call, I'm sorry, lady, there just aren't enough of us to comb the whole city looking for your friend, she's probably staying with friends right now, I wouldn't worry about the Veterans if I was you, don't worry call us tomorrow we'll let you know if anything and on and on and on.

Maud Hampton was always polite to the police sergeants, even though Hattie Tyler didn't have anybody in the whole wide world except for the people at Sunshine Delight. Neither had Tommy Nelson, found in an alley two days after he had gone out for a wee bit of a stroll, his chest a sieve of knife wounds; neither had Mrs. Spagnoli, who at the age of eighty-two always carried a straight razor in her purse "for protection." She was found face down on top of her purse, the razor nearly folded in its velveteen case, the back of her head smashed in by a chunk of rebar. Maud never reminded the police sergeants of the murdered Matures from Sunshine Delight and the other board and care homes in the neighborhood. It was important to be polite.

She hated that: "Matures." It was worse than "Senior Citizens" or just "Seniors." All the euphemisms were worse than "old people with no family," which is what they were. Most wanted to live alone, but their hands were too shaky to light a stove, and what would happen if they fell and broke a hip, or had a stroke, or took the wrong medicine? They survived in sterile, frightened little groups.

They had lived through the homogenizing of America by malls and fast-food franchises; dozens of upheavals in social mores; and the final war in Europe: the Warsaw War. Now the challenge was to survive the return of the New Army soldiers.

The police sergeants could never understand their terror. The New Army veterans were media darlings whose photogenic exploits, courage, and ferocity were canonized by the TV as *The Best Youth We've Ever Had*. Lars, a veteran of Vietnam, had seen immediately that these new soldiers had *enjoyed* wartime slaughter more than any other American generation. Yet there was a vague guilt about it all, as though they had, perhaps, fought *too* hard. Then it turned out that the little circuit modules implanted at the base of their skulls couldn't be removed without

irreparable personality damage, so of course they were left in, where they wouldn't even be noticed in peacetime. As usual, hordes of soldiers came home to not enough jobs and not enough schools, and the resentment of those who had nothing to show for the big risk they had taken swelled. And these men weren't just ordinary citizens returning to ordinary lives. They were New Army: violent, professional, victorious. The war was past for all but the unlucky few whose slightly damaged Units kept up a continuous electronic urge to go berserk. Only the victims of bludgeonings and their next of kin had no pity for them.

The cracked plastic tone arm of the Sears Oldie Repro Stereo lifted, twisted, and dropped on the lead-in groove of the antique vinyl. In the loud white noise, a familiar voice sang: "One, Two, Three, What are we fighting for?"

"I'm going to bed," said Mr. Spina, and Mrs. Benson began to cry. "Poor Hattie! Poor Hattie!" she moaned, until Joan, the night-shift aide, came to help her into her room.

Maud looked down, exhausted and desolate at the fate of her friend, and idly noticed a new bruise on her arm.

"The police! They never call back!"

"I spoke to them, Lars," said Joan, returning to the living room. "They're going to send a car to the neighborhood."

"Can't even go out for a walk! I always used to go out for a walk."

"Everybody's afraid," Joan said, less professionally than she intended.

*Afraid! I'm so tired of being afraid!* Maud looked at her friends. There was nothing to say. Exhausted, she went to bed, staring at ceiling sparkles and remembering Hattie. Eventually she turned off the light and tried to sleep. It was impossible. At least she had her magazine. Filling her head with *Elletry Queen* often helped her forget her aches and troubles.

This evening, the thought of *Elletry Queen* brought back the men at Morton's, and her unexpected encounter with the New Army. Sparkhead, Theodore, the chief gangster ... so much to be afraid of all the time. *I don't want to be afraid any more!*

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Cabs were expensive, but there was no other way to get to the industrial section. Maud had no idea how to dress, finally deciding on her church clothes, with the hat and veil. Cane, photo I.D., clinic card, bus pass, a few dollars, and her checkbook fit into the little purse. Her hands clutched the little scrap of paper with the address of the Pan Southwest Warehouse near Sky Harbor.

In a huge sea of striped asphalt, the windowless facade showed gray block through faded crumbling stucco. The loading dock was small, and the only other door was in the back. The cab dropped her off, and she was alone.

The bell worked.

"Whaddaya want," said a grouchy voice, more a statement than a question.

"I'm looking for a man named Theodore," Maud said.

"Nobody here by that name."

"Please sir! I have a message for him. Please! Tell him: 'It's raining dogs and cats.'"

There was a pause. Cautiously: "Wait a minute."

It seemed more like ten minutes, and then the door opened.

"Theodore!" Maud smiled, extending her hand.

"Nice to see you again!"

He wrinkled his brow, then beat it once with a beefy fist. "You're the lady from the deli! Yeah, I remember you. Whattaya doin' here?"

"It's raining dogs and cats."

He studied her, shaking his head. "If you're asking what I think you're asking, you gotta be crazy. Now go away and forget you ever saw me." He started to close the door.

"No! Wait! I have to call a cab! Please let me in!" She pushed the tip of her cane against the threshold.

It took him a minute to realize that he shouldn't attract attention by stranding a Mature in the middle of the air freight district.

"Thank you, Theodore," she said, walking in. "You have no idea how hard it is to be old these days. It's rare to find someone as courteous as you."

"Now, look, lady—"

"Could you spare a glass of water?"

"Yeah, but—"

"Thank you, thank you. So hard." She sat in one of the chrome-legged chairs which, with a folding table, were all the front-office furniture. "Another one of the residents in my home was killed last night," she said. "By a New Army veteran."

"Look, lady—"

"Maud."

"I got hard-luck stories of my own. You gotta go. I can't do nothing for you."

"I don't want to be afraid all the time! Is that so much to ask?"

"Then see a shrink. What cab company you want me to call?"

"You don't understand. I have money. I can pay you five thousand."

Theodore turned a chair around and settled on it, resting his thick arms on the back. "You're a nice lady, Maud. These things, they can hurt you, hurt you bad in ways you can't imagine. Your money ain't worth that much to me."

"It might be to the other man."

Theodore winced. "Why don't you stay nice and mind your own business?"

Maud looked him right in the face. "No one knows I'm here. I'm not afraid of operations. Lord knows I've had enough of them."

"This is ridiculous. You're getting out of here and that's that. He stood up.

"Please, Theodore—"

"Ted."

"Just call the other man, ask him his opinion. A second opinion."

"I don't need no second opinions! He ain't running this, I am!"

"Well, there you are." Maud sat back in her chair.

"All the money, and no risk. No one would believe an old lady became a — what do you call them? —

'wirehead,' and I don't have to be afraid any more." She leaned forward in her best Ellery Queen manner. "Is it a deal?"

Theodore's mouth fell open. He shut it, and, slowly shaking his head, got up and unlocked the inner door.

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"Doctor MacIntosh, Madam. Pleased to be of help. Do sit down, please." The effect of dignified authority conveyed by the white coat and immaculate white pompadour was somewhat marred by the tracery of venules on the bulbous nose, the faint tremor of the hands, and the fragrance of Ten High on the breath. Maud swallowed her anxiety and seated herself on the operating chair, a massive contraption of stainless steel and black vinyl, huge polished spikes aiming eerily at the head of the occupant.

"I believe we can dispense with the paperwork in this case," said the good doctor.

"Just tell me what to do," Maud shut her eyes.

"A little local anesthetic *here* and over *here*, just a little bee sting, that's all.... Now I'm going to apply the tongs."

Maud felt a mild pressure at various places in her head, and suddenly she couldn't move. A wave of fear; but no, soon there would be no fear.

Micky, the doorman, whispered to Theodore. "Jeez, boss, she's really old. What if somethin' happens?"

The Boss chewed his lip. "I shoulda thrown her out." He watched MacIntosh fumble about, drop a gleaming instrument on the floor, pick it up, and replace it, unwiped, on its sterile towel.

"All right, my dear. Now we're going to take a little picture of your brain, see where everything is. Don't forget to smile, ha-ha." The enormous infrared imager slid over Maud's cranium.

"I don't like this, Boss. If we burn out a few wiseguys, what's the difference? That old lady, she coulda been my mother."

"Whyn't you shut up?"

A printer clattered. "Here we are. Ho ho, the amygdala are a trifle lower than expected! Just have to make an adjustment over here...." MacIntosh looked at the stereotactic controls, trying to figure them out, and failing, retrieved a dog-eared manual from a nearby desk.

"Boss—"

"I said shuddup! Hey, Mac! Come over here a minute, will ya?"

The doctor ambled over; Theodore hustled him into the front room.

"You keep your hands off me," MacIntosh muttered. "I haven't had a drop since this morning."

"That ain't it. Listen, me and Micky were discussing this whole thing and—"

"She's as healthy as a proverbial racehorse. The operation is really nothing, as you know."

Theodore grabbed the doctor's lapels and jerked him into the air. "Oh yeah? I had five grand on Belt Buckle at Aqueduct two months ago, we even had the other horses doped, and that damn nag dropped dead at the gate! This operation is over! Make up some bunko medical reason and get her outa here!"

The big man was about to send two hundred of the

good doctor's dollars out the door. MacIntosh thought as fast as a brain thinned by alcohol could think.

"Wait a minute, wait a minute. Maybe tickling her aggression nucleus might, ah, overstimulate her heart, you never know. Still, we might be able to give her something that would satisfy her. She really wants a Unit, you know. Really."

Theodore wasn't blind to the money either. "What're you thinking of?"

"We could put the unit in, but leave the wires out. Give her the suggestion that she won't be afraid any more. If she thinks she's not afraid, isn't that the same as not being afraid?"

There was something wrong there, but Theodore couldn't figure it out.

"I dunno. The Man says 'always give value for the dollar. That way we stay healthy, get a good reputation, and the wiseguys keep comin' back.'"

From inside, Micky called out, "She says if she sits there much longer, she's gonna hafta pee."

"Alright, alright. Okay, Mac, make it look good."

They returned to the clean area, where Maud sat in the operating chair, completely immobilized by tongs and velcro.

"These things are getting quite uncomfortable!"

"It won't be much longer." MacIntosh began the preparations, washing the skin of the back of her head, applying anesthetic to the incision area, mumbling the platitudes of calm confidence as he had to countless patients throughout his licit and illicit career. At last the skin was opened and the holes in the cranium had been drilled.

*Maybe they're right, he thought. She might not survive the first spasm of aggression. But she's certainly holding up okay now.* He uncoiled the four thin wires. Looking up, he saw that the entire operating area was out of his bosses' line of vision. *I ought to do something nice for her. To hell with that bastard!* "Theodore," humph. Smiling, he went back to the neuroanatomy atlas. No, no blood vessels in the way ... should be easy. He wrote the coordinates down.

"What's goin' on?"

"Just standard procedure, as you know, Theodore. Calibrating the Unit as usual." In minutes the Unit, jimmied into automatic operation, sat in a skin pocket at the base of Maud's skull.

The receptor wires slid through the blunt probes. Not a drop of blood. Then the stimulator wires. He pushed them slowly in.

"Tell if you feel anything, my dear."

"Just these things in my head, doctor. Hey, stop! Stop!"

Theodore and Micky jumped up.

"What is it?" asked MacIntosh with exaggerated calmness.

"That felt good there! Is that it? Is that it?"

MacIntosh brushed the sweat off his brow with his forearm. "Yes indeed, my dear. You're doing splendidly. Now to sew you up, and we'll be done."

Thirty minutes later, she sat in the office, awaiting her cab. "I feel fine," Maud said, "a little sore at the incision, but I guess that's par for the course. I really don't feel anything else."

MacIntosh, in a fresh white coat, nodded sagely.



Theodore grinned, as pleased by her survival as her money.

The cab arrived, but as she was leaving, MacIntosh stepped forward. "Mrs. Hampton," he said as professorially as possible, "before you go, let's just check it out. Would you please strike at Michael here with your cane?"

Maud looked at all of them in turn. It felt odd to hit someone, especially someone so big. Micky nodded and smiled, so, with as tight a grip as possible, she suddenly swung the birch shaft at his face. He missed catching it, and it landed across his jaw. Micky stumbled back with a curse, and Theodore turned to him, as amazed as Maud by her strength.

"How did that feel?" MacIntosh asked her.

Maud caught her breath. She blushed slightly, her eyes downcast, breathing a little heavily, but not at all painfully.

This was so unusual. She looked up, and met MacIntosh's penetrating gaze. "I feel grand," she said.

The cab honked. "Thank you gentlemen ever so much," Maud said, stepping down the steel stairs. "The way I feel, I've already gotten my money's worth."

"Jeez, blood! She opened my chin up!"

MacIntosh turned to Micky, beaming with medial benevolence. "Oh dear! Let's just see how many stitches—"

"Keep your hands off me, you damn quack! Jeez, Ted, I gotta get over to Good Sam."

Ted was staring after the departed cab. "Did you see her eyes?" he asked no one in particular. He turned to MacIntosh. "What did you do in there?"

"Why, nothing at all, really. I certainly didn't wire her amygdala, just like you asked."

"Oh yeah?" Ted pushed MacIntosh backwards through the door into the clean room, back to the operating area. The neuroanatomy atlas lay open, and a shaky line of ink marked a few legends in the border. "What's this?"

"Ahh, just a few technical notations, really nothing to...."

"It says 'pleasure center.' MacIntosh, did you stick that thing's wires into her pleasure center?"

"Well, ahh, not exactly...."

"You drunk idiot. What the hell's gonna happen now?"

Micky's mouth gaped. "You mean, when she hit me, she had a—"

"She coulda been my *mother*, you pervert!" Ted grabbed MacIntosh, pressed him against the wall, cocking a massive arm back. MacIntosh stared fearfully at the huge fist. "My mother!"

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"Maud! We've been so worried!"

"Where have you been? Joan has already called the police!"

Maud smiled, carefully sliding her cane into the rack. The cabbie brought her package in and leaned it up in the closet. "Dear friends! It's still early afternoon. There's nothing to be alarmed about."

"So where have you been?" demanded Mrs. Spina.



"Oh, shopping. Enjoying Phoenix. The air is so lovely here when it's not too hot. I'm tired of acting like a shut-in."

"That's what we are. Shut-ins. Shut in by *them*."

Maud beamed at the residents of Sunshine Delight who had gathered to listen to the conversation. "You may decide to be shut-ins," Maud said evenly. "Or you may not. I am not a shut-in, and I don't intend to become one now. I am going to the movies tonight. Lars, will you accompany me?"

Her eyes swept a semicircle of shock and silence.

"Classics Revisited is doing a Stallone retrospective. Tonight is 'Rambo IX — The Falklands,' I believe. Lars?"

(Continued to page 62)



# Boomerangs

## Comments From Our Readers

Hey, ABO!

Bet you think you're really slick, don't you? Okay, so maybe you are. Just don't forget that some of us knew you when you were a newspaper tabloid. I've enjoyed watching you evolve, I only hope you're not through doing so. An improvement I would like to see is the addition of a mailing cover to keep the address label from obscuring the art. (Yes, I know it takes money.) (See *Editor's notes in this issue* — Ed.) Would this be a good time to tell you I'm renewing? Never mind — you probably saw the check before the letter. (Yup. — Ed.)

I've found your selection of stories and authors to be consistently good. I'm rapidly becoming a fan of Robert Metzger. And I was glad to see the addition of more book reviews. I read lots of books (but only one sci fi mag).

And now a criticism, if you don't mind. Or even if you do. I thought David Deitrick's illustration for Mutmind would have been a better choice for the cover. Bob Eggleton's cover for ABO No. 3 was outstanding but his cover for ABO No. 8 didn't do a thing for me. (Like many things, art appreciation is a matter of taste. We thought Bob's edged David's out for the cover, as it did this time. They're both terrific. But this is the only magazine where any of the art could be on the cover! — Ed.)

Anyway, keep up the good work.

Lonny Eaves  
Amarillo, TX

Greetings from Planet Earth:

Received my initial shipment from you last week, Issues 1-7. Marvelous magazine. The new slick format. January/February issue arrived yesterday, today and hopefully the rest of it will arrive tomorrow.

Hopefully I'll be able to take it together and read it. At the moment it says "AB GL SC FN."

Please, how can I get a one-piece issue?

I'll gladly pay more if you'd find a safer way of shipping these magazines. (We agree — See *Editor's notes in this issue*. — Ed.)

Thanks  
George M. Lupo  
Minneapolis, MN

WOMAN DEVOURS ABORIGINAL  
IN ONE SITTING!

POLICE ARE STILL INVESTIGATING THE STRANGE DISAPPEARANCE OF AN ABORIGINAL REPORTED LAST SEEN IN A BELLEVUE APARTMENT. WHEN INVESTIGATORS ARRIVED AT THE SCENE THERE WAS NO SIGN OF A STRUGGLE. THE SUSPECT WAS FOUND UNCONSCIOUS ON THE FLOOR WITH SCRAPS OF THE ABORIGINAL STILL CLUTCHED IN HER HAND.

SHE WAS INCOHERENT WHEN REVIVED BY PARAMEDICS. THERE SEEMED TO BE NO PERMANENT DAMAGE. SUSPECT SHOULD BE ABLE TO STAND TRIAL FOR THE BRUTAL CONSUMPTION OF AN ABORIGINAL. NAMES ARE BEING WITHHELD AT THIS TIME, UNTIL THE PROPER AUTHORITIES HAVE BEEN CONTACTED.

Dear ABO,

You find above the news release of my capture. Although I am guilty of the total consumption of the *Aboriginal*, I was provoked. The thing arrives at my doorstep every month or so and then sits there staring at me until I devour the whole thing. I just got caught this time.

I am a junkie. An *Aboriginal* junkie, and until I get my fix, I go slightly insane. *Aboriginal Science Fiction* is the only thing that satisfies my craving. Even if convicted of this crime I will still continue to devour every *Aboriginal* that I find.

Well, time to go, the Alien Judge is here, and he doesn't look friendly. Wish me luck.

Until next time,  
*Aboriginal Junkie*

March/April 1988

P.S. Please include a copy of your Writer's Guidelines to the above address, as I might want to write of my experiences as a Junkie. There might even be a movie contract in this. Sort of a "Man Bites Dog" story, only it is "Earthling devours Aboriginal."

P.P.S. Keep up the good work guys. This stuff is fantastic! Can I come to work for you? Or do you hire convicted consumers? (It might be a long commute — Ed.)

Christi L. Baker  
(alias: Junkie)  
Bellevue, WA

ATTENTION: Alien Publisher  
Dear Gentelthing:

The osteodontokeratic culture on Earth among primitive protohumans was (if Raymond Dart was correct) a bone-tooth-horn culture. Bone-tooth-hair culture didn't appear until the middle of the 17th century, and it was then limited to European aristocrats with nothing better to do than invent coiffures, truss themselves into corselets and corsets, and await the various revolutions that would sweep them onto the ash-heap of fashion. There was a bony-tooth-hairy counter-culture in the Western world in the 1960s (1962-72) but this is problematic since scholars disagree as to whether there was at the time any Western culture to be counter to.

Sincerely,  
Rick Erlich

Dear Charlie,  
Thank you for at last, finally, and (I hope) irrevocably bringing SF out of the Dark Ages. Thank you for admitting in print that we the fans are not only an intelligent species, but, have a sense of humor as well. When I got your offer to purchase a subscription and the first six issues well, it was "an offer I couldn't refuse." I have devoured the first three issues, (pausing only for one brief 500-page *Star Trek* novel) am well into the fourth

and look forward each evening to flipping as many more pages as time and my wife will permit. I find the light airy tone refreshing. It's much harder to put down than the stuffy we've-been-around-forever-and-have-a-big-name mags. Your stories are exciting, posing new concepts in many cases; your articles informative without going over my layman's head; and about your artwork I can only say thank God and innovative publishers.

I have to put myself in the downtrodden but triumphant minority and applaud your decision to downsize (don't feel bad, Cadillac succumbed to pressure too). Even giving up those fantastic color extravaganzas, the new size is much easier to handle and the paintings still come across with all their dazzling clarity. In my view a definite improvement to an already outstanding effort.

Enclosed is the requisite SASE in which I ask that you please send a copy of your writer's guidelines as I have several ideas which I hope will fit into your format.

Bravo/Bravo to all involved!

Sincerely,  
Vern Trumbly  
Lincoln, NE

Dear Charles:

This is just to say felicitations on the January-February issue of *Aboriginal SF*.

The color illustrations on slick paper are stunning. Or should I say dazzling? Anyhow, they're beautiful.

I was glad to see the names of two of my colleagues from the Taos workshop on the cover — Kris Rusch and Ray Aldrich.

And I hope 1988 will be a great year for you and *Aboriginal*.

Best,  
Jack Williamson  
Portales, New Mexico

Dear People of *Aboriginal SF*,

I look forward to receiving your magazine with anticipation and delight (jumping up and down in the Post Office is a bit undignified and I do attract a crowd but your publication warrants my infantile clapping of hands). I thank you and Mrs. (Susan) Ellison for the flier which brought your work to my attention. The Alien Publisher brings an extra terrestrial ethnicricity to the human condition that I find amusing and illuminating. Though I may not always agree with your book reviews I find them helpful in my decisions on which books to read first (perhaps more importantly which books to buy first). And the original artwork and stories are fantastic. I also enjoy reading about your contributors. (The usual two-line synopsis of an author's or artist's life and work infuriates me). You have won in me not only a reader for life but also a voluntary salesperson.

Always waiting for the next issue,

Laura Ambler  
Ashland, OH

Dear Charlie:

When I talked to you, I hadn't yet seen a copy of the November/December issue of *ABO*. I greatly enjoyed your editorial about writing and becoming a writer. Your magazine is extremely supportive of new writers and I have appreciated all the time and effort you have put into my work. (I also enjoyed talking with Laurel on the phone last week. It's sometimes hard for me to talk with people I haven't met, but she relaxed me immediately.) It was nice to see you plugging both *Clarion* and the *Writers of the Future* people. As you know, I've been to both workshops and found them both very valuable (also wrote an article on *Clarion* which ran in the November, 1987, issue of *Amazing*). Now I'm involved with something I believe is equally valuable, but on a different level.

A year ago, in January, Dean Wesley Smith and I started a weekly workshop here in Eugene. The workshop, called the Pulphouse Gang, meets in a local restaurant and does *Clarion*-style critiquing with some *Writers of the Future* techniques mixed in (as well as anything else we feel like experimenting with). The workshop is free and writers of all levels attend. What differentiates us, and our sister workshop, the Moscow Mafia in Moscow, Idaho, from other local workshops is our emphasis on becoming professionals. Each manuscript is critiqued with an eye to its marketability. Some people turn in everything they write. Others, like me, turn in manuscripts that we're having trouble with. About twenty writers show up every week, although our base is probably closer to fifty people. We also network with other writers and writing workshops across the country through Dean's *Pulphouse Report*, a free newsletter which he assembles every month.

One of the reasons I'm telling you about this is that Pulphouse and the Mafia provide a service available to any aspiring writer. We critique manuscripts by mail. All a writer has to do is send ten copies, a cassette tape, and an SASE with adequate postage for everything to be returned to:

The Pulphouse Gang  
P.O. Box 1227  
Eugene, OR 97440

We'll critique the manuscript as if the writer is present and return everything within a month or so. This is a free service. Writers should be warned, however, that our criticism is honest. We do not make generalizations such as, "This manuscript shows you can't write," but we will tell a writer when a manuscript has so many scars that the piece should be set aside and started again from scratch. We critique the manuscript, not the writer, and we do try to be

very supportive.

Critiquing by mail isn't as good as being at the meeting (you can't always tell on a cassette whose opinion to believe and whose should be ignored), but it's better than nothing. We will also tell people if we know of a workshop in their area (or how to find or start one).

Workshopping isn't for everyone, but I do know that it has helped me.

Best,  
Kirstine Kathryn Rusch  
Eugene, OR

Dear Alien Publisher,

I'm only 12 years old but I love science fiction so when my school was selling magazine subscriptions my dad got *ABO*. I love it! I just got my first issue a couple days ago. I think that the stories are excellent. The illustrations are wonderful. It's all around great magazine. I'm glad my dad ordered it for me.

Your youngest subscriber,  
Jennifer Beattie  
Chino, CA  
(Welcome aboard, but you aren't the youngest reader. I'm only 12 at heart. — Ed.)

Dear Alien Publisher,

I'm sure you find many things confusing, being the new kid on the block, as it were. But your amazement at a token economy stunned me. Just what do your people do for trade?

Let me try to elucidate.

Imagine a barter system. Farmer Jones grows wheat — a commodity that everyone needs. Mr. Diddly makes doodads. Farmer Jones trades a specified amount of wheat for a doodad. (He only needs one; doodads are useless in bulk.) Jones is all set — he has all the doodads he'll ever need. However, Mr. Diddly will be in dire straits as soon as the wheat runs out. Doodads don't fulfill any nutritional requirements.

Over in a neighboring county lives Farmer Smith. He wants a doodad, but has nothing Diddly needs. He raises horses. Even if he could get Diddly to trade for a horse, a doodad isn't worth an entire horse. He could, perhaps, trade the right haunch, but that would basically ruin the horse for future plowing.

Will poor Farmer Smith have to do without a doodad forever?

Of course, if he traded with Farmer Jones, he could get a doodad, and even have some wheat left over. Fine. It's inconvenient, since Farmer Jones lives 28 miles away, but it can be done.

Fortunately, Farmer Jones doesn't live 100 miles away.

In the center of the city is poor Programmer Peabody. Doodad makers don't really care about software, and farmers care even less. The

(Continued to page 59)



# Impact

By Ben Bova  
Art by Bob Eggleton

"Four minutes 'til the nuke goes off!"

The words rasped in Jay's earphones. He knew that the woman was nearly exhausted. Inside his pressure suit he was soaked with sweat and bone tired himself. The adrenaline had run out hours ago. Now all they were going on was sheer dogged determination.

And the fear of death.

"It's got to be here someplace." Desperation edged her voice. Four minutes and counting.

Long months of training guided Jay's movements. He halted in the midst of the weird machinery, took the last of the anti-static pads from his leg pouch, and

carefully cleared his helmet visor of the dust that had accumulated there.

Then immediately wished he hadn't.

Six other pressure-suited figures had entered the factory complex. Each of them carried a flechette gun in his gloved hands.

Jay tried as best as he could to duck behind the lumbering conveyor belt to his right. He motioned for the woman to do the same. She had seen them too, and squatted awkwardly in her suit like a little kid playing hide-and-seek.

No radio now. They would pick up any transmission and home in on it. Actually, Jay realized, all they





have to do is keep us here for another three minutes and some, then the nuke will do the rest. They don't care if they go with us. That's their real strength: they're willing to die for their cause.

The woman duck-walked to Jay and leaned her helmet against his.

"What do we do now?" she asked. Her voice, carried by conduction through the metal and padding of the helmets, sounded muffled and muted, as if she had a bad cold.

He knew shrugging his shoulders inside the pressure suit would be useless. But he did it anyway. There was nothing else he could think of.

They were hiding in the midst of Moonbase's oxygen factory, out on the broad plain of Mare Nubium, the Sea of Clouds, that had seen neither water nor air for more than four billion years. The factory was out in the open vacuum, no walls, covered only by a honeycomb metal meteor screen so thin that it almost seemed to sway in the nonexistent breeze.

Automated tractors hauled stones and powdery soil scooped from the Moon's regolith and dumped their loads onto the conveyor belts, ignoring the human hunters and their prey. Crushers and separators and ovens squeezed and baked precious oxygen from the rocks, then dumped the residue into

piles at the far side of the factory, where other automated machinery mined metals and minerals from the tailings. Glass filament piping carried the oxygen to huge cryogenic tanks, giant thermos bottles that kept the gas cold enough to remain liquified.

The conveyor belts rumbled, the crushers pounded away, in nearly total silence. Jay could *feel* their throbbing through the concrete pad that formed the base of the factory. In the vacuum of the Moon, though, normal sound was only an Earthborn memory.

In all the vast complex there were no human workers, only robots. No humans set foot in the factory, except for the two cowering behind the main conveyor feed — and the six now spreading out to cover all the perimeter of the factory and make certain that Jay and the woman could not escape.

Three minutes thirty seconds.

Jay closed his eyes. Hell of a way to end it. The nuke will wipe out the oxygen factory, and that'll kill Moonbase. We won't go alone, he thought grimly.

\*\*\* \*\*

It had started innocently.

Jay had reported for work as usual, riding the power ladder from his quarters on level four to the main plaza. It was Tuesday, and sure enough, there

was a fresh shipload of tourists hopping and tumbling and laughing self-consciously as they tried to adjust their clumsy Earth stride to the one-sixth gravity of the Moon.

The tourists wore coveralls, as the Moonbase Tourist Office advised. But while Jay's coveralls were a utilitarian gray with Velcro fastenings, the Flatland tourists were brilliant with garish Dayglo oranges and reds and yellows, stylish metal zipper pulls dangling from cuffs and collars and calves. Just the thing to tangle in a pressure suit, Jay thought sourly as he entered the garage office.

He had expected to spend the day driving a tour bus around Alphonsus, locked away from everyone in his solitary cab while some plastic-smiled guide pointed out the ruins of Ranger 9 and the solar energy farms with their automated tenders and the robot processors that sucked in regolith soil at one end and deposited new solar cells at the other. The tourists would snap photographs to show the Flatlanders back home and never have to leave the comfort of the bus. Jay would drive the lumbering vehicle back and forth across the crater floor along the well-worn track and never have to speak to anyone. But the boss had given him a red ticket, instead.

"Special job, Hazard," she had said, in that hard tone that meant she would brook no arguments. "Flatland VIP wants to see Copernicus."

"Christmas on a crutch!" Jay fumed, lapsing back to the euphemism he had used when his father would punish him for profanity. "That's a six-day ride."

"And it's all yours," the boss retorted. "Got Number Three-Oh-One all set for you. See you in six days."

Jay knew better than to complain. He snatched the red ticket from the boss's counter and stomped out into the garage. Actually, he thought, a six-day trip up to Copernicus and back might not be so bad. Away from the tourists and the boss and the rest of the world for nearly a week. Out in the wilderness, where there isn't a blade of grass or a puff of air or even a sound — alone.

Except for some Earthside VIP. A part of Jay's mind wondered who he might be. Somebody I used to know? The thought sent a wash of sudden terror through him. No, it couldn't be. The boss just picked me out of the computer. She knows I like to be left alone. She's trying to do me a favor.

Still, the thought that this VIP might be someone from his former life, someone from his father, even, scared him so much his stomach felt sick.

When he saw who it was, he relaxed — then tensed again. It was a woman, a petite snub-nosed redhead who looked too young, too tiny and almost childlike, to be a Very Important Person. But when Jay got close enough to see her brown eyes clearly, he recognized the kind of non-sense drive and determination he had seen in others: his father, his former commanding officer, the grim-faced men who had led him into treason and disgrace and banishment.

She was waiting for him by the bus, in the midst of the noisy, clanging garage. She wore dark maroon coveralls, almost the color of Burgundy wine. No

dangling zipper pulls. A small slate-gray duffle bag hung from one shoulder.

"Are you my driver?" she asked Jay.

"I'm the driver."

He was nearly a foot taller than she, and he judged that they were roughly the same age: late twenties. Jay had not bothered to shave that morning, and he suddenly felt grimy and unkempt in her level stare. She didn't have much of a figure. Her mouth was turned down slightly at the corners.

"Okay then," she said. "Drive."

He popped the hatch and stood beside it as she climbed the metal steps slowly, uncertain of herself in the low lunar gravity. Jay took the six rungs in one jump and ducked into the shadowy interior of bus 301.

Outside, 301 looked like any other heavily used tour bus: its bright yellow anodized hull had been dulled by exposure to vacuum and the hard radiation that drenches the lunar surface. There were dents here and there and a crusting of dust along the wide tracks. The crescent and human figure of its stylized Moonbase logo was the only fresh bit of color on its bodywork. Management saw to that.

Inside, though, 301 had been fitted out for a long excursion: the seats removed and a pair of sleeping units installed, each with its own bathroom facilities. The galley was forward, closest to the cab, and the airlock and pressure suits at the rear by the hatch. Jay would have preferred it the other way around, but he had no say in the design of the bus or its interior layout.

Without a word to his passenger, he pushed past her and slid into the driver's seat. With one hand he slipped the comm headset over his thick dark hair, while with his other he tapped the control board keys, checking out the bus's systems displays. He got his route clearance from the transit controllers and started up the engines.

The bus lumbered forward slowly, the thermionic engines purring quietly, efficiently. Jay felt his passenger's presence, standing behind and slightly to one side of him, as he steered along the lighted path through the busy garage and out to the massive airlock.

She slipped into the right-hand seat as he went down the final checklist with the controllers. The inner airlock hatch closed behind them; Jay thought she tensed slightly at the muted thump when the massive steel doors sealed themselves shut.

"You're cleared for excursion, 301," he heard in his earphone.

"Three-oh-one, on my way," he muttered.

The controller's voice lightened. "Have fun, Jay. Six nights with a redhead, wow!" He chuckled.

Jay said nothing, but shot a quick sidelong glance at his passenger. She could not hear the controller, thank the gods.

The airlock's outer hatch slid open slowly, revealing the desolate splendor of the Sea of Clouds. It was night, and would be for another sixty hours. But the huge blue globe of Earth hung in the sky, nearly full, shining so brilliantly that there was no true darkness.

Mare Nubium looked like a sea that had been petrified. The rocky soil undulated in waves, almost

seemed to be heaving gently, dimpled by craters and little pockmarks and cracks of rilles that snaked across the ground like sea serpents. The horizon was brutally near, like the edge of a cliff, sharp and uncompromising as the end of the world. Beyond it the sky was utterly black.

"I thought we'd be able to see the stars," his passenger said.

"You will," Jay replied.

"My name's Kelly," his passenger offered.

"It's on the trip sheet," Jay replied. "Kelly, S. A. From Toronto, Canada. First time on the Moon."

"What's your name?"

Jay turned his head toward her. For the love of Godzilla, don't tell me she's a Moon groupie, he said to himself. We're going to be cooped up in this tin can for six days.

"Jay," he snapped.

"The woman at the tourist office told me it was Jonathan."

He twisted uncomfortably in the chair.

"Everybody calls me Jay."

"Jonathan Jr."

Jay looked at her again. *Really* looked at her. "Who the hell are you?"

"I told you. My name's Kelly."

"You're no tourist."

"And you're no bus driver."

"What do you want?"

Kelly studied his face for a moment. It seemed to Jay that she was trying to smile, trying to put him at his ease. Not succeeding.

"I want to know whose side you're on," she said at last.

"Side? What are you talking about? I'm not on anybody's sucking side! Leave me alone!" He kicked in the brake and 301 shuddered to a stop.

"You picked the wrong side once," Kelly said, her voice flat, as if she were reading from a memorized dossier. "The people who sent me here think you might have made the same mistake again."

"I'm taking you back to the base."

She put a hand out toward him. "If you do, I'll have to report our suspicions to the Moonbase security people. You'll lose your job. As a minimum."

"Leave me alone!"

"I would if I could," Kelly said, her voice softening. "But there's a nuclear bomb on its way to Moonbase. It might already be here. Some people think you're in on the deal."

He stared at her. Even here they had followed him. Even here, in the midst of all this emptiness, a quarter-million miles from Earth, even here they were hounding him.

He took a deep breath, then said evenly, "Look. I'm not in on any deal. If you want to tag me with some wild-ass charges, think up something more believable than a nuke, huh? Just let me do my job and live in peace, okay?"

Kelly shook her head. "None of us can live in peace, Jay. A nuclear weapon is going to wipe out Moonbase unless we can find it and the people who are behind it. And damned soon."

"You're crazy!"

"Maybe. But we're not going to Copernicus. We're going to Fra Mauro."

"The hell we are," he growled. "You're going right back to base." He grasped the steering wheel and started to thumb the button that would put the tracks in gear again.

"If I do," Kelly warned, "you'll be on the next shuttle heading Earthside to face an interrogation on your part in this scheme."

He glared at her.

Kelly did not glare back. She smiled sadly. "I wouldn't be talking with you if I thought you were part of any terrorist group. But if you refuse to help me, I've got no choice but to turn you over to the people who think you are."

Every muscle in Jay's body was tensed so hard that he ached from toe to scalp.

Kelly leaned toward him slightly. "Look. The nuke is real. These people intend to blow out Moonbase. Help me find the bomb and you can make everybody back Earthside forget about your past mistake."

He felt as helpless as he had when he was a baby and his father would suddenly swoop down on him and toss him terrifyingly high into the air.

"You don't understand," Jay said slowly, miserably. "I don't care if they remember what happened back then or not. All I want is to be away from it all, away from all of them. All of them. Forever."

She made a sympathetic sound, almost like a mother cooing at her infant. "It doesn't work that way. They've come here. Maybe not the same people who got you into trouble in the first place, but the same *kind* of people."

His head sank low. He closed his eyes, as if that would make her go away and leave him alone.

"You've got to help me, Jay."

He said nothing; wished he were deaf.

"You've got no choice."

Wordlessly he put the tracks in gear and pushed the accelerator. The lumbering bus shuddered and started forward.

She's right, he told himself. I've got no choice. One mistake haunts you for the rest of your life. They'll never leave me alone, no matter how far I run. Not for the rest of my life.

He drove 301 in silence, not even glancing at the young woman sitting beside him. The vehicle plowed along for more than an hour, following the network of tracks worn into the powdery regolith that headed northward across Mare Nubium in the general direction of Copernicus.

But when Jay reached for the radio transmitter control on the dashboard, Kelly's hand quickly intercepted his.

"I've got to get Fra Mauro's coordinates from the data bank."

"I'll punch in the coordinates," she countered.

He pointed to the bus's guidance computer; Kelly typed out the coordinates with smooth, practiced efficiency. Jay noticed that her hands were tiny, her fingers as small as those of a child's doll.

(Continued to page 42)

# Birthplace

By Chris Boyce

Art by Pat Morrissey

1.

The sea was the colour of ball bearings, she decided, millions of ball bearings all the way out from the breakwater to the horizon line where the sky lay on it like pale quartz rising through deepening slate shades to the cloud with a blackthorn heart hanging above the harbour.

A salt sour wind scoured the jetty and the streets backed up onto the mountain, a hard wind blustering her clothes, flinging little spits of coming rain into her face.

Rocking back and forth on the grassy ledge, looking down on the town, on the two trawlers skelping back to safety across the bay, she projected a parting in the clouds and brought down the Finger of God to write a sign, a hieroglyph of fire on the water.

*I MADE ALL THIS FOR YOU ...* it said, sun-bright, and died.

Why come here, Anna? You are thirty-eight years old now. You last visited at least fifteen years ago. There are not many left who know you and even those few you would have to remind because you've changed. You're middle-aged. You speak properly, like an academic should, with only a trace of the accent, enough for your peers to recognize so they can understand that you're not pretending to be what you never have been — to let those who need to know know that you're not full of shit.

One has to be taken seriously by the serious thinkers.

This is where May was born and Alice and Lizzie the Tongue and probably her mother as well all the way back into the Christ-knows-when. Their men were born here too, Alex and Johnny and Tommy — no, he came down from the city, that's right, came down to recuperate in the Mission Hospital after the first war and met her on the strand. The story went that he was the finest looking soldier ever to have come to the town to get better and weren't all the women lining up for him, begging to be noticed and there wasn't a nurse in that hospital wasn't ready to turn hussy for a night beneath the sheets with him. So the story goes, any road. And he's walking along the strand with a nurse at each side seeing as how he's been badly injured and all (what were old Tommy's injuries supposed to have been?) and who is sitting there up on the wall chewing away on a pickled herring for her lunch but Lizzie who knew there was no chance she'd get a fine soldier-boy; only the local lads could stand the

stink of the fish-wives even after they'd scrubbed the gutting sheds off their skin and out of their hair as best they could and put on fresh clothes. Except whatever Tommy's injuries were (he had the top of his head bandaged) they'd done for his sense of smell entirely. Says he to Lizzie, Could you spare us a bite, lovely girl? They feed us that much gruel and milk up yonder I'm trying to remember what real food tastes like. Just one bite? And Lizzie looks at him really taken aback, like he'd just bounced a half-brick off her head and she says, No trouble, soldier, just hop up here and I'll bite you anyplace you fancy. Lizzie the Tongue was never at a loss for words.

The first of the trawlers was in past the breakwater, into the calm, the sheltered mouth of the new harbour. Back of it, across five miles of sea, the clouds had parted and the sea was storming brightly below. Some great force blazing and tossing the ball bearings, she thought.

Her mother's and grandmother's stories about Lizzie the Tongue cheered her. She was buried in the graveyard the other side of the mountain, buried fifty years ago and Alice, her only daughter, twenty-eight years ago. But May, Mama the fierce and warm and wonderful, May was buried with Dad in the alien tropical place they had made home and that was only last week.

Why come back, Anna? There's nothing for you here....

Yes there is. There's a solace. There's the knowledge that it goes on and on and it's always rich and varied and warm-blooded, that life isn't just a meteor flash gone as you glimpse it. There's the proof that people's lives flow through each other all across the world in little crosscurrents here and there, now and then, back and forward in time all connected, all weaving together. There's the fact that it's not all pain and grief, that it's sweet too, that even in the sadness there's a kind of —

The other trawler was in difficulty. Behind it darkness was closing over thick and brutal waters and the vessel was leaning off course headed at the breakwater rather than round it. Anna stood and briefly thought of alerting someone and then saw two, three small but speedy motorboats feathering out into the harbour. Then the wind slapped her back onto the grass and dumped rain on her and didn't stop.

2.

"May Eastwater's girl are you? Well, I remember





PICT. "CONJUGACY"

you in your pram at the Lamas back now when would it be? Maybe nineteen eighty-five would that be right? I thought so. Did May come back after that? Oh, what am I talking about she was here at her mother's funeral and she was here for Katherine's baby's christening. Oh no, that was your father. Oh dear dear. You were here for that too. I remember now. You were giving Charlie Simpson a bad time. Oh, he broke his heart over you. Mind you at twenty-two he should've known better, should've been married. And did you ever — here take a dry towel, love, and I'll take that mug. More soup? Certainly. Did you know that Katherine and her man have taken over the Eastwater farm? Well, I'm certain your father would have been pleased as Punch about that. He and Dan hadn't a farmer's bone in their bodies. Katherine was the farmer and her man, Billyboy MacAllister, he's got all the land that used to be the Grady's along the South Loans so they're becoming really well-to-do...."

You'd forgotten all about Charlie Simpson, Anna. Not a nice episode. Hanging over your dreams of this place like that cloud above the harbour. He was so tempting, so ... sweet, so melt-in-the-mouth with his dreamy smile and gentle ways. So you seduced him or should it really be classified as oblique sexual assault? Oh how he didn't want to throw himself away on anybody, not in these times of grim diseases, but it was so easy to make him want to because he remembered you from the years when you came every summer with Dad to stay with Uncle Dan on the farm and play with "aunt" Kate who was only a few years older than yourself. Even back then you could make him do whatever you pleased. And for six months after he wrote you and wrote you wanting to know if you were pregnant he wanted you that much. Whatever became of Charlie? You never replied.

"Here you are, love. Careful now, it's too full. Charlie Simpson? He married a girl from over the mountain, plain little thing, very quiet like himself. Got kiddies, three boys. They live abroad now. He became a tissue engineer, you know. Plenty of money in that line I hear. No, these clothes of yours still seem pretty damp to me. I'll turn up the radiator and rearrange them a little, shall I? And what is it you do now? Any children?"

Tell her you're a non-Godelian, Anna, you're an alchemical mathematician working on the interface between consciousness and the perceived universe, you're the Anthropic Project Director at the Tipler Institute. Well, tell her you're —

"A research scientist. Well! Not like those silly buggers on the moon, I hope. No offense, but they get everything wrong. How in the name of God are they going to build machines that can make anything? Get everything? Make whatever ye want just like that? All their stuff and nonsense about utopia, no starvation, no disease. They've been saying all of that and more since Adam was a boy I'm sure. Nobody believed them then, nobody believes them now. It's just another excuse to waste billions playing themselves. Oh don't put the money to some practical use like building some new orbital drug factories or a few more star tanker shuttles to get more stuff down here where it's needed instead of squandering it all up

there where they're all healthy and well fed anyway. Makes you sick."

What if you told her that you're more of a witch than a scientist, more a high priestess than a researcher? What if you told her that she can have her star tanker shuttles, her orbital drug factories and almost anything else if she really *really* wants? Tell her that she can shape her own destiny, the destiny of others, by imposing her will on the universe, that the universe exists not simply because it exists, not simply because it has to be there or we won't be here to perceive it, but it exists because we *want* it to.

No, she replied to the repeated inquiry.

"Shame. Children make a power of difference to your life and it's not as if a woman can't have a career and a brood as well, not these days. Different when I was a girl. I knew your grannie well. Not that we ever became good friends because it's not the same when you live at different ends of the town but she was a lovely woman, Alice Tierney. Now these are drying out a treat. Where are you staying? The Royal Arms? Well, I think it's letting up. You'll be able to put these back on in a minute and get down there without catching your death."

As if that were something possible for you to catch, Anna.

### 3.

But not the Royal. Oh, no. Too many memories of the bar on Lamas nights and the vodka and orange and the whiskey and ginger ale, the raucous singers from the Young Men's Association (none under fifty). Or other nights with the police up flashlighting the parked cars and checking the upstairs bar for past-time drinkers and us all huddled out on the roof of the kitchen with our heads down so they couldn't see us through the bloody window. Oh, no.

No, Miss Kegharty's will do fine. Never heard of her, never knowingly laid eyes on the woman till this day, till I rang the button bellpush beside the black-painted *Bed & Breakfast* on the whitewashed wall. Inside there's a lot of whitewash too and polished floorboards, waxed bright like the hundred-year-old tables and their chairs in the dining room. The house smells strongly of lavender and carboic except in the morning when the breakfast has been fried. Just like the farmhouse when I was little and lying just about awake in the big upstairs bed and below were the throbbing voices of Dad and Dan laughing and sometimes singing and then would come Kate's voice, lighter and sharper like a thinner blade cutting through my dreaminess and I wanted to be up and doing and down there with them, with her for there was so much so very very much....

Tomorrow I will go see Kate, surprise her. Surprise myself too for I'll see a thoroughly middle-aged woman with no more grown-ups standing like safety rails between herself and the far edge of life. Just like me and not like me at all.

This boarding house is a secret labyrinth of corridors and side rooms and back rooms and unexpected places. It is busy, well attended even this late in the year, even when the "seaside" is no longer popular as it once was. The room found for me is at the end of a

dim high-ceilinged upper-floor access to drying cupboards and water tanks. Go down some steps at the far end and there are two doors one left to a bathroom, one right to a narrow bedroom where I write this and if I look out the window I see that the bathroom and the bedroom are rooms above an arch. Below me, below this floor is space, a gateway through which cart-horses once dragged their charges.

Now there is a smell in the cool aftermath with the light lying crisp and reserved on the town, gentle like the dry sweet smell with its smoky base. This was always a place of smells. Some mornings a smell would wake me just after daybreak, a smell so violent I wanted to gag and there was no escape but to dab cologne under my nose. How I prayed to sleep till that smell was gone and sometimes I did, waking to catch only its last traces. Of course Uncle Dan and Kate couldn't smell it. Dad did but he was old and to him it was so faint and unobjectionable.

#### 4.

The figures still come up when I call them from the graft, called directly into my vision centre from the implant so I see them superimposed on the room about me, I see the projected probability threads climb across the glowing image of the Sacred Heart beside the door, across the door's glistening black veneer up into the thread-thin plaster cracks near the ceiling. This graft works better than ever. I can write on it, like this, communicate across the planet at lightspeed, plug into the big nets like the Flow, CC-L, Proton. Even use the Outlink to patch into offworld and lob thoughts across the three-hundred-million-mile-plus stretch of the Inner System Transfer. Zippy stuff!

They make a big play about graft communication, about brainstem to brainstem transfer — call it *telepathy* for chrissake! — about communication without frontiers, about the main thing for communication being the quality of the link. Bullshit.

The main thing for communication, the only thing for communication is the quality of what is being communicated. Send it in Morse if you want, in semaphore. Forget the singer, concentrate on the song.

Outside someone goes by under the window on a bicycle, bell ringing twice and whistling something almost familiar. Downhill all the way to the harbour from here but the streetlights are coming on pitching the cyclist into an amber haze. There was a time when those same lights went out at midnight each night and once I was out with a boy and the blackness fell with terror and laughter. Daddy and Dan came looking for us....

Why didn't you love this place, May? He did. He came back every year, every year with or without me till the argument at the christening of Kate's baby. After that he never came back but he thought of this place and dreamed of it and it tore at his heart that there was no love left for him here.

Is there something about this place that the women only know, Mama? Something that we're born with when we're born unromantic and hard be it in or out of poverty in this place? You wanted away and soon as I was born you were away, you and Dad. What

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Art: Katerina



did you say about it? Something about too much black magic, too many black hearts. I don't think you ever mentioned it, ever brought it up unless somebody asked you about it, usually me. Even then you said little unless it was to tell stories about Lizzie the Tongue or your own mother, Alice, but mostly about Lizzie. You wanted to call me Lizzie but you didn't. Why? Some kind of fear? Superstition?

What happened between Kate and Dad was really between Dad and Billyboy, the man — none could be good enough for Kate then or ever — she chose to marry and broke Dad's heart or spirit. But you always avoided that subject, May, Mama, never spoke of Kate, always changed the subject if she broke the surface of a conversation and you turned away till she was gone again, back to the depths ... of what? And what did you hide from him, what guilt assumed for his part?

I must sleep now. I turn out the light and huddle the bedclothes about me for here even the summer nights have a serrated edge. I close my eyes and sigh. In a moment I will command the implant grafted into my nervous system to place me in sleep mode. The implant does not itself sleep.

## Sleep.

5.

6.

- Consciousness is like gravity; it is a field phenomenon belonging to the fundamental equations that govern the laws of physics and the nature of the perceived universe. Without it there can be no universe.

Dad was is

— ABO —

# Impact

(Continued from page 35)

When the bus turned off the heavily tracked course toward Copernicus and started westward, Jay punched in the autopilot and took his hands from the wheel. He leaned back in his seat and tried to relax. It was like trying to breathe vacuum.

"Are we really going to Fra Mauro?" he asked.

"Close."

"What makes you think the nuke is hidden there?"

"We have our information sources."

"We?" He turned in his seat to look fully at her.

"Did my father send you?"

She said, "No. I'm not working for the Peacekeepers. Not directly, anyway."

"Then he *does* have something to do with this!"

"The Peacekeepers have no jurisdiction here. They're only allowed to operate when an attack is launched across an international frontier."

"So they claim."

"Moonbase isn't about to be invaded," Kelly ignored his thrust, "it's being threatened by a gang of terrorists. We're trying to stop them."

"Who the hell is this 'we'?"

"Private operation."

He waited for more. When she did not offer it, Jay asked, "And the terrorists?"

"Professionals. No particular political loyalty, except that they're against the industrialized nations and against the Peacekeepers."

Jay remembered a group of men and women who were against the Peacekeepers. Feared that the International Peacekeeping Force was a first step toward a world government. Refused to accept the idea of having their nations disarm and trust their defense to a gaggle of foreigners. They had rebelled against the IPF and nearly won. Nearly. Jay had been one of those rebels. His father, now an IPF marshal, had branded him a traitor.

"Some of the smaller nations," Kelly was saying, "don't like the IPF in general, and hate Moonbase in particular. Lunar ores and space factories are competing with Third World countries. They say that just when they're starting to make a success of industrialization, Moonbase is underselling them."

"So they hire a gang of professionals to nuke Moonbase."

"That's it."

"And where do they get their nuclear device? The IPF's been pretty damned thorough in dismantling the world's nuclear arsenals."

"Not really," said Kelly. "Disarmament's been more or less at a standstill for the past several years. There's at least half a dozen nukes unaccounted for. Somebody named Jabal Shamar stole them and disappeared."

"And you think one of them's here?"

Nodding, "Or on its way. Shamar sold it for the equivalent of a hundred million dollars. In gold."

Jay whistled with awe. Despite himself, he believed her story. That's just what some of those bastards would do. They don't care who gets killed, as

long as it isn't them. The only part that he refused to believe was her insistence that his father had no role in this operation. He knows about it, Jay told himself. He knows exactly where I am. Down to the millimeter.

A flicker of movement caught his eye. Movement meant only one thing on the eons-dead surface of the Moon.

"Another vehicle up there."

Kelly barely moved in her seat, but her body tensed like a gun being cocked.

"Another bus?" she asked.

"Out here? No way."

"Then what...?"

He tapped the camera keyboard and displayed the view on the screen that took up the middle of the dashboard. The vehicle was a smallish tractor, painted bright red, not unlike the automated crawlers that tended the solar energy farms. But the bubble riding atop it was undeniably a life-support module.

"Two-man job," Jay muttered.

"Have they seen us?"

"Probably. Might be from Lunagrad."

"This far south?"

"It's a free territory," Jay said. "They've got just as much right to poke around here as anybody."

"Is it likely?"

"No," he had to admit. "The Russians usually stay close to their own bases. And there's no scientific excursion out here — that I know of."

"Turn around," Kelly said.

"What? I thought you wanted to get to Fra Mauro."

"I do, but I want to get there alive. Turn around!"

She was genuinely frightened, Jay saw. He gripped the wheel and slewed the bus almost ninety degrees, angling roughly northeast.

We can tell them we just took a side trip on our way to Copernicus, Jay said to himself. Then he realized that he had accepted her view of the situation without thinking consciously about it: he had accepted the idea that this crawler was carrying two terrorists who had somehow learned of Kelly's mission and were here to stop her.

Kelly popped out of her seat and went back toward the sleeping compartments. She returned with a pair of binoculars in her hands, big and black and bulky. Jay recognized the make and model: electronically boosted optics, capable of counting the pores on your nose at a distance of ten miles.

"They're following us." Her voice was flat, almost calm. Only the slightest hint of an edge in it. "Two men in the cab, both wearing pressure suits with the visors up."

She's been in heavy scenes before, Jay thought. Probably a lot more than I have. In the back of his mind he remembered the only real danger he had ever seen, the battle in orbit that his side had lost. Because of me, Jay heard his mind accuse. We lost because of me.

"They're gaining on us," Kelly announced, the binocs glued to her eyes. "Can't you go faster?"

"This tub isn't built for speed," Jay grumbled, leaning on the throttle. The bus lurched marginally faster.

"There's no place to hide out here," she said. "It's like the ocean." He thought that his father would know what to do. An old salt like him, with his Annapolis training, would be right at home on this lunar sea.

"You've only got the one airlock?"

Jay nodded. "Emergency hatch here by my side," he nudged the red release catch with his left elbow, "but you've got to be in a suit to use it."

"We'd better suit up, then. And fast."

"Now wait a minute..."

She cut him off with a dagger-sharp look. "You say you're not in with them. Okay, I'll believe that. As long as you *behave* like you're not in with them."

Jay turned away from those blazing eyes and looked out the side window. The red crawler was gaining on them, coming up on their left rear.

Kelly said, "Suits."

She's scared of what they'll do when they overtake us, he thought. Deep inside him, Jay was frightened too. He set the controls on autopilot and followed the diminutive redhead back toward the airlock hatch.

It took nearly fifteen minutes to worm into the suits and check out all the seals and systems.

"When we get outside," Kelly said through her open visor, "no radio. If we have to talk, we put our helmets together."

"Tete-a-tete."

She flashed a quick grin at him, thinking it was a pun rather than standard lunar jargon.

They clumped back to the cab, single file in the bulky suits. The crawler had gained appreciably on them. It was scarcely half a kilometer away. Jay began pecking at the guidance computer's keyboard.

"What are you doing?" Kelly demanded. "We don't have time..."

"Instructing this bucket to circle around and head back to base. That way we can pick it up again later. Don't think we're going to *walk* back to Moonbase, do you?"

"I hadn't thought that far ahead," she admitted.

They made their way back to the airlock and squeezed inside together. The outer hatch was on the right side of the bus, away from the approaching crawler. His stomach quivering with butterflies, Jay snapped his visor down securely and punched the button that cycled the airlock. He had to override the safety subsystem that prevented the lock from being used while the bus was in motion.

It seemed like an hour. The pumps clattered loud enough to be heard Earthside. Finally the amber light turned to red and the outer hatch popped slightly ajar. Jay swung it open the rest of the way.

The rough landscape was rushing past them at nearly thirty clicks per hour. It looked very hard and solid, totally uninviting.

"You sure you want to do this?" he asked.

"It's better than being killed."

"Maybe."

"You first," she commanded.

Jay obeyed almost by reflex. He waited for a patch of ground that was relatively free of rocks, then jumped from the lip of the airlock. It wasn't until he was soaring through the vacuum in the dreamlike

slow motion of lunar gravity that he realized this might all have been her ploy for getting the bus to herself.

He landed on his feet, staggered sideways with the acceleration from the bus, and fell to the ground. With instincts honed by almost three years on the Moon, he put out both arms, caught himself before he hit the dusty soil, and pushed himself erect. A few staggering steps and he was safely balanced on his feet.

He had kicked up some dust, but not as much as he had feared. This area's not as dusty as some, Jay thought as he watched the powdery clouds slowly settle around him.

Kelly jumped and tumbled when she landed, skidding sideways down the slight slope of a worn ancient craterlet. Jay dashed after her as 301 trundled off in the opposite direction, on its own, under automatic control.

She was waving frantically at him. God, she's hurt, Jay thought. Or her suit's ripped.

He slipped and slid down the almost-glassy slope of the little crater and ended up on the seat of his pants, by her side.

She was on her stomach, lying still. Backpack did not seem damaged. No obvious leaks. He leaned his helmet against hers.

"Are you okay?"

Kelly reached an arm around his neck and yanked hard. "Get down, asshole!"

Jay flattened out, feeling his face flame with sudden anger.

"Want those bastards to see us?" she hissed. "Why don't you wave a friggin' flag?"

Jay held onto his swooping temper. For a few moments they lay side by side. Then Kelly wormed her way to the lip of the crater. Jay followed.

Rising only far enough to see across the pockmarked plain, they watched 301 dwindling toward the horizon, with the red crawler still closing the distance between them.

But then the crawler stopped. The pod hatch opened and one of the pressure-suited figures climbed out.

Jay turned his head toward Kelly. "Of all the mother-loving dimwits, you gave yourself diarrhea over nothing. They're surveyors! Look, they're taking out their tools."

"Oh yeah?"

The man had taken an arm's-length rod from the tool pack on the rear of the crawler. He hiked it up onto his shoulder, then turned and aimed it at the retreating bulk of 301.

The rod flashed sudden flame. A blaze of light streaked across the airless plain and hit 301. The bus exploded. All in total silence.

Jay watched, stunned, as pieces of 301 soared gently across the landscape. He recognized one fragment as the driver's chair, tumbling slowly end over end and smashing apart when it finally hit the ground.

"Jesus," Jay whispered.

"Some surveyors," Kelly muttered.

How in the name of St. Michael the Archangel are we going to get back to the base? Jay asked himself. If we call for help those guys will hear us and come over

to finish the job.

Kelly was pecking at the radio controls on the left wrist of her suit. Is she going to surrender to them? Not likely, he knew.

She pointed to the frequency setting, then to the side of her helmet, and finally put a finger up in front of her visor. Jay understood her sign language. They're using this freak; listen, don't talk.

They lay side by side at the lip of the little crater, watching and listening. The two terrorists drove their crawler to the gutted wreck of 301 and started inspecting the wreckage. They want to make sure of us, Jay realized.

Leaning his helmet against Kelly's, he whispered, "Maybe we can grab their crawler while they're poking through the debris."

Her voice was muffled, but he could feel the reproach in it. "We wouldn't get fifty meters before they spotted us. They're professionals, Jay. We're lucky they didn't see you dancing around when you jumped from the bus."

His face went red again. And he realized that whispering was stupid, too.

"Then what..."

"Shh! Lemme hear them."

Jay could not understand the language coming through his earphones, but apparently Kelly could. She repeated it, like a translator:

"...they could have jumped before the rocket hit them....But that means they knew who we were....It makes no difference....I can't figure that, must be slang or a joke...they're laughing — Ah! They're saying we can't get very far on foot. If we call for help they'll home in on our transmission and finish us off."

Jay nodded inside his helmet. That was the crux of the matter.

"Why bother?" Kelly resumed translating. "The oxygen plant will be blasted away in another twelve hours. They'll never get back in time to do anything about it."

Kelly pounded her gloved fist on the glass-smooth rim of rock. "The oxygen factory! That's it!"

She slid down slightly and turned on her side. Jay stayed up at the rim, watching and thinking.

We could send a warning to Moonbase, put them on alert. But then those killers would find us. And that would be that.

So what? he asked himself. You're finished anyway. They're never going to leave you in peace. She told you that. The only way out is death.

He looked out across the desolate expanse of rock. The two terrorists were making their way back to the crawler now, their foreign words sounding musical yet guttural in his earphones, almost like a Wagnerian opera.

It'd be easy enough to open your visor, wise guy, Jay told himself. Just crack the seal and take a nice deep breath of vacuum. Poof! Your troubles are all finished. You wouldn't be the first guy to do it that way.

His gloved hands did not move. I don't want to die, Jay realized. No matter what happens, I sure as hell don't want to die.

Suddenly his earphones shrieked with a wild

whining, screeching wail. He clamped his hands uselessly against his helmet, then stabbed at the radio control on his wrist and shut off the skull-splitting noise.

He slid down beside Kelly. She was staring at her wrist controls.

"Jammer," Jay said.

"They're taking no chances," she agreed.

"They're going to leave us out here and jam any radio transmission we might send."

"That means they'll be staying with your crawler," he said. "The jammer's only got a limited range — far as the horizon."

"We can walk away from it."

"If they don't see us."

"How long would it take to get back to Moonbase?"

"Too long," Jay answered. "Unless..."

"Unless what?"

"Follow me and do what I do. Stay low as possible until we're out of their sight."

They crawled on their hands and knees, slowly, carefully across the small crater and over its farther rim. The powdery top layer of the regolith turned to dust wherever they touched it. Before long the dust was clinging to their suits. Jay could feel it grating in one of his knee joints. That could be dangerous. Worse, it covered the visors, obscuring vision.

Not that there was much to see. Jay watched his gloved hands tracking along the barren regolith. It reminded him of videos about evolution he had seen as a schoolchild: the emergence of life from the sea onto

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dry land. Never find land drier than this, he knew.

At last he stopped, sat upright, and took a visor pad from the pouch on his leg. The dust clung stubbornly to his visor, electrostatically charged by the invisible inflow of solar wind particles.

He helped Kelly clear her visor. Cautiously, he rose to his feet. The damned crawler could still be seen, which meant the men in it still had a chance of spotting them.

Back to crawling, like an infant, like a lizard, like a slimy amphibian just learning to walk. We must make a weird sight, Jay thought. He stopped again and looked back. Only the rooftop of the crawler was in sight. He flicked his suit radio on for the briefest instant; the shriek of the jammer still burned his ears.

Motioning for Kelly to stand, he leaned close to her and said, "They've got a tall antenna. We're still being jammed, but at least we can walk now."

They cleaned their visors again, then headed off almost due east.

After several minutes Kelly tapped Jay's shoulder. He leaned down to touch helmets.

"Isn't Moonbase in that direction?" She pointed roughly southwestward.

Jay snorted at her. "Don't try to navigate by the stars. The Moon's north pole doesn't point toward Polaris."

"Yeah, but..."

"I'm following 301's tracks," he pointed to the churned soil. "If we can make it back to the main beat between Moonbase and Copernicus we'll come across an emergency shelter sooner or later. Then we..."

He jerked with surprise, then swiftly pulled Kelly down flat onto the ground.

Wordlessly he pointed at the crawler that was slowly making its way toward them. From the direction opposite the crawler they had just left. This one was painted bright orange. It too had a life-support module atop it, and a tall whip mast, visible only because of the tiny red light winking at its end.

They sent a team to follow us, Jay realized. They boxed us in: one team from Fra Mauro, the other behind us from Moonbase.

He half-dragged Kelly away from the track of 301, angling toward the Copernicus-Moonbase "road" and away from the oncoming crawler. They might not be part of the terrorist gang, Jay thought. Might be a coincidence that they're here. They might even be Moonbase security searching for us. Sure. Might be Santa Claus, too.

For hours they walked, seemingly lost. Not the slightest sign of civilization. Not even a bit of litter. No trace of life. Nothing but rocks and craters and the sudden horizon with the utterly black sky beyond it. And the dust that clung to them, rasped against their suits, blurred their visors.

Suits are good for forty-eight hours, Jay kept telling himself. Oxygen, heat, water enough for forty-eight hours. Radiation protection. They'll even stop a micrometeor without springing a leak. Says so in the instruction manual.

But he wondered.

Time and again they tried their suit radios. Still the wailing scream of the jamming defeated them.

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"They must have planted jammers along the whole route," Jay told Kelly.

"That means we'll have to get back to Moonbase itself in..." she peered at the watch on her suit wrist, "...six hours."

No way, he knew. Not afoot. But they kept walking. There was nothing else to do. For hours.

Kelly fished a wire from one of her suit pouches and they connected their helmet intercoms, like two kids talking through paper cups and a soaped string.

"It's got a lonely kind of beauty to it," she said. "I never thought of the Moon as beautiful before."

Jay nodded inside his helmet. "I wouldn't call it beautiful. Awesome, yes. It's got grandeur, all right. Like the desert in Arizona."

"Or the tundra up above the Arctic Circle."

"It'll take a long time before people screw up this place. But they'll do it. They're already starting the job, aren't they?"

Kelly was silent for a while, then she asked, "Why'd you put in with the rebels? Against the Peacekeepers?"

He expected the old anger seething in his gut. Instead he heard himself answering almost calmly, "I fell for their line. Said the U.S. couldn't trust its defense to a bunch of foreigners. Said Washington had sold us out to the Third World and the Commies."

"I was with the Peacekeepers."

"You were? Then?"

"Before. About three years before."

"So you believe in them."

"They've kept the peace. The nations are disarming. Or they were, before they realized Shamar had made off with his own little arsenal."

"And how do you feel about a hundred little nations bossing the U.S. around?"

"I'm a Canadian," Kelly replied.

"Oh."

They lapsed into silence. Then Kelly spoke up again, "You're lucky you didn't have to go to jail. Most of the other conspirators got long sentences."

"Sure, I'm lucky all right."

"Your father must have been a big help. He's running the IPF now, you know."

The old anger was strangely muted, but Jay could still feel the resentment smoldering inside him. Or was it shame?

"Big help," he mocked. "Instead of jail he got me banished to the Moon. I can't set foot back on Earth for another seven years, not unless you get me arrested and bring me back in handcuffs."

"It's better than being in jail, though, isn't it?"

Jay hesitated. "Yeah, I guess so," he had to admit.

"Your father must've twisted a lot of arms to get you off the hook. Most of 'em got life."

Jay opened his mouth to answer, but he had no reply. He had never considered the proposition before. Dad pleaded with the court to lighten my sentence? He found that difficult to believe. Especially after he had rejected the old man's offers of help. It did not square with all he knew about the stern, uncompromising man who had left his mother so many years ago. Very difficult to believe.

But not impossible.

Jay was still pondering this new thought when he stopped and stared at a tiny red light blinking against the dark sky, just over the horizon. He reached for another cleaning pad and wiped his visor. The light did not move or waver.

"Hey, look!" he yelled.

He pointed, then gestured for Kelly to follow him. An emergency shelter. Fresh oxygen and water. His suit was starting to smell bad, Jay realized. He hadn't admitted it to himself until now.

And maybe a radio with enough power to burn through the jamming. Less than three hours left. Won't do us much good to get to the shelter if Moonbase itself gets wiped. Just prolong the agony.

The shelter was a life-support module from the earliest days of lunar exploration, buried under several meters of scooped-up regolith rubble. Safe as a squirrel's nest in winter.

The left leg of Jay's suit was grating ominously as they hurried the last kilometer toward the shelter. The dust was grinding away at that knee joint. He looked over at Kelly. She seemed to be keeping pace with him, despite her shorter legs.

They made their way down the slight slope to the shelter's airlock entrance. It was too small for both of them to go through at the same time, but they squeezed into it together anyway. Jay heard somebody laughing as the airlock cycled; it was his own voice, cackling like a madman.

"We made it, kid," he said. "We're safe."

"For the time being," she reminded him, as the inner hatch slid open.

The shelter was old and small; its inner walls curved up barely high enough to allow Jay to stand upright. The equipment inside looked ancient, dusty. Even the bunks seemed moldy with age.

"They've already been here." Jay saw that the life support console was smashed, as if someone had taken a sledgehammer to it. They dared not remove their suits.

Kelly asked, "The radio...?"

Also hopelessly battered, useless.

"Just about two hours now," Kelly said. "How long will it take us to get back to Moonbase?"

"Depends," he replied, "on whether this shelter has a hopper in working condition."

Jay led the way back through the airlock and out behind the pile of rubble covering the shelter.

The spidery body of a lunar hopper stood out in the open. It looked like a small metal platform raised off the ground by three skinny bowed legs. An equally insubstantial railing went around three sides of the platform, with a pedestal for controls and displays. Beneath the platform were small spherical tanks and a rocket nozzle mounted on a swivel.

He inspected the hopper swiftly. "Cute. They shot up the oxygen tank. No oxygen, no rocket. Lazy bastards, though. They should have dismantled this go-cart more thoroughly than this."

Explaining as he worked, Jay ducked back inside the shelter and came out with a pair of oxygen bottles from the shelter's emergency supply and a set of tools. It took more than an hour, but finally he got the long

green bottles attached firmly enough to the line that fed the rocket's combustion chamber.

At least I *think* it's firmly enough, he told himself.

He helped Kelly up onto the platform and then got up beside her, snapped on the safety tethers that hung from the railing, and plugged his suit radio into the hopper's radio system. Kelly followed his every motion.

"Ready to try it?" he asked.

"Yeah. Sure." Her voice in his earphones sounded doubtful.

He nudged the throttle. For an eternally long moment not a thing happened. Then the platform shuddered and jumped and they were soaring up over the lunar landscape like a howitzer shell.

"It works!" Kelly exulted. Jay noticed that both her gloved fists were gripping the railing hard enough to bend the metal.

"Next stop, Moonbase!" he yelled back at her.

They got high enough to see the lights of the base's solar energy farm, spread out across the shore of the Mare Nubium, where automated tractors were converting raw regolith soil into solar cells and laying them out in neat hexagonal patterns.

Jay tried to steer toward the lights, but the hopper's internal safety program decided that there was not enough fuel for maneuvering *and* a safe landing. So they glided on, watching the lights of the energy farm slide off to their right.

It was eerie, flying in total silence, without a breeze, without even vibration from the platform they stood upon. Like a dream, coasting effortlessly high above the ground.

Kelly used the hopper's radio to send an emergency call to Moonbase security. "There's a nuclear bomb planted somewhere in the oxygen factory," she repeated a dozen times. There was no answer from Moonbase.

"Either we're not getting through to them or they're not getting through to us," she said, her voice brittle with apprehension.

"Maybe they think it's a nut call."

He sensed her shaking her head. "They've *got* to check it out. They can't let a warning about a nuclear bomb go without checking on it."

"Nukes are pretty small. The oxygen plant's damned big."

"I know," she answered. "I know. And there isn't much time."

Jay realized that they were flying *toward* the imminent nuclear explosion. Like charging into the mouth of the cannon, he thought.

A long silence, and then they began descending. The ground was slowly, languidly coming closer. And closer.

"Will one nuke really be enough to wipe out the whole base?" Kelly asked.

"Depends on its size. Probably won't vaporize the whole base. But they're smart to put it in the oxygen factory. Like a shooting a guy in the heart. The blast will destroy Moonbase's oxygen production. No oh-two for life support, or for export. Oxygen's still the Moon's major export product."

"I know that."

"The bomb will kick up a helluva lot of debris, too. Like a big meteor impacting. The splash will cover the solar energy farms, I'll bet. Electricity production goes down close to zero."

Kelly muttered something unintelligible.

Jay had to admire the terrorists' planning. "They won't kill many people directly. They'll force Moonbase to shut down. Somebody'll have to evacuate a couple thousand people back to Earth. Neat job."

The ground was coming up faster now. Automatically the hopper's computer fired its little rocket engine and they slowed, then landed with hardly a thump.

"We must be a couple of clicks from the factory," Jay said. "You stay here and keep transmitting a warning. I'll go to the factory and see what's happening there."

"Hell no!" Kelly snapped. "We're both going to the factory."

"That's stupid..."

"Don't get macho on me, Yank, just when I was starting to like you. Besides, you might still be one of the bad guys. I'm not letting you out of my sight."

He grinned at her, knowing that she could not see it through the helmet visor. "You still harbor suspicions about me?"

"Officially, yes."

"And unofficially?" he asked.

"We're wasting time. Let's get moving."

There was less than a half-hour remaining by the time they reached the oxygen factory.

"It's *big*!" Kelly said. Their suit radios worked now; they had outrun the jammers.

"There's a thousand places they could tuck a nuke in here."

"Where the hell are the Moonbase security people?"

Jay took a deep breath. Where would I place a nuke, to do the maximum damage? Not out here at the periphery of the factory. Deep inside, where the heavy machinery is. The rock crushers? No. The ovens and electric arc separators.

"Come on," he commanded.

They ducked under conveyor belts, dodged maintenance robots gliding smoothly along the factory's concrete pad with arms extended semi-menacingly at the intruding humans. Past the rock crushers, pounding so thunderously that Jay could feel their raw power vibrating along his bones. Past the shaker screens where the crushed rock and sandy soil were sifted.

Up ahead was the heavy stuff, the steel complex of electrical ovens and the shining domes protecting the lightning-bolt arcs that extracted pure oxygen from the lunar minerals. The area was a maze of pipes. Off at one end of it stood the tall cryogenic tanks where the precious oxygen was stored.

It was dark in there. The meteor screen overhead shut out the Earthlight, and there were only a few lamps scattered here and there. The maintenance robots did not need lights and humans were discouraged from tinkering with the automated machinery.

"It's got to be somewhere around here," Jay told



Kelly.

They separated, each hunting frantically for an object that was out of place, a foreign invading cell in this almost-living network of machinery that pulsed like a heart and produced oxygen for its human dependents to breathe.

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Jay watched the six pressure-suited figures, his mind racing. Less than three minutes left! What the hell can we do? Where's the base security people?

For a wild instant he thought that these six might be Moonbase security personnel. But their suits bore no insignia, no Moonbase logo, no names stencilled on their chests.

Feeling trapped and desperately close to death, Jay suddenly yelled into his helmet microphone, "That's it! It's disarmed. We can relax now."

Kelly scuttled over to him and pressed her helmet against his. "What are you..."

He shoved her away and pointed with his other hand. The intruders were gabbling at each other in their own language. Two of them ducked under a conveyor belt and headed straight toward the tall cryogenic storage tanks.

"Come on," Jay whispered urgently at Kelly.

They duck-walked on a path parallel to the two terrorists, staying behind the conveyors and thick pipes, detouring around the massive stainless-steel domes of the electric arcs until they came up slightly behind the pair, at the base of the storage tanks.

Jay jabbed a gloved finger, gesturing. Beneath the first of the tanks lay an oblong case, completely without markings of any kind.

One of the terrorists bent over it and popped open a square panel. The other leaned over his shoulder, watching.

"I should have brought a gun," Kelly muttered.

"Good time to think of it."

Without straightening up, he launched himself across the ten meters separating them from the terrorists. Arms outstretched, he slammed into the two of them and they all smashed against the curving wall of the storage tanks.

Jay had seen men in pressure suits fight each other. Tempers can flare beyond control even in vacuum. Most of the time they were like the short-lived shoving matches between football players encased in their protective padding and helmets. But now and then lunar workers had tried to murder one another.

He knew exactly what to do. Before either of the terrorists could react Jay had twisted the helmet release catch of the nearer one. He panicked and thrashed madly, kicking and fumbling with his gloved hands to seal the helmet again. He must have been screaming, too, but Jay could not hear him.

The second one had time to stagger to his knees, halfway facing Jay. But Kelly slammed into his side, knocking him over against the oblong crate that held the nuclear weapon.

Jay scooped up one of the fallen flechette guns and fired a trio of darts into the man's chest. The suit lost its stiffness as the air blew out of it, spewing blood through the holes. He turned to see the other terrorist fleeing madly away, legs flailing as he bounced and

sailed in the low gravity, hands still fumbling with his helmet seal.

"One minute to go!" Kelly shouted.

Jay pushed the dead body away and grabbed at the nuke.

"It's too heavy for..."

"Not on the Moon," he grunted as he jerked the two-meter-long case off the concrete floor and hefted it to his shoulder.

"This way," he said. "Take their guns. Cover me."

They ran, straight up now, five meters at a stride, no hiding. Back the way they had come, toward the rock crushers. If this thing's salvage-fused we're finished, Jay told himself. But the first thing they do when they decommission a weapon is remove the fusing. I hope.

A pressure-suited figure flashed in front of him, then spun and went down, grabbing at its chest. Out of the side of his visor Jay saw two more figures racing to catch up with him. One of them tried to jump over some pipes. Unaccustomed to the lunar gravity, he leaped too hard and smashed into an overhead conveyor belt.

Jay didn't need a watch — his pulse was thundering in his ears, pounding off the seconds. He saw the rock-crushing machines up ahead, felt a sting in one leg, then another in his side.

His suit radio wasn't working. Or maybe he had shut it off back there somewhere, he didn't remember. His vision was blurring, everything was going shadowy. All he could see was the big conveyor belt trundling lunar rocks up to the pounding jaws of the crusher.

Lunar gravity or not, the package on his shoulder weighed a ton. He staggered, he tottered, he reached the conveyor belt at last and with the final microgram of his strength he heaved the bulky package of death onto the rock-strewn belt and watched the crusher's ferocious steel teeth, corroded with dirt and stained by chemicals, crunch hungrily into the obscene oblong package of death.

Jay never knew if the bomb went off. His world turned totally dark and oblivious.

\*\*\*\*\*

The first face he saw when he opened his eyes again was his father's.

J.W. Hazard was sitting by the hospital bed, gazing intently at his son. For the first time Jay could remember, his father's grim, weathered face looked softened, concerned. Instead of the hard-bitten, driving man Jay had known, Hazard seemed at a loss, almost bewildered, as he stared down at his son. His eyes seemed misted over. Even his iron-gray hair seemed slightly disheveled, as if he had been running his hands through it.

"You're going to be okay, Jay-Jay," he whispered. "You're going to pull through all right."

Jay's mouth felt as if it were stuffed with cotton. He tried to swallow.

"Wh..." He choked slightly, coughed. "What are you doing here, Dad?"

"I came up when they told me what you'd done."

"What did I do?"

"You saved Moonbase, son. They damn near killed you, but you kept the nuke from going off." There was pride in the older man's voice.

"The girl...Kelly?"

His father smiled slightly. "She's outside. Want to see her?"

"Sure."

Hazard got to his feet carefully, not entirely certain of himself in the low gravity. We're still on the Moon, Jay realized. His father was in full uniform: sky-blue tunic and trousers with gold piping and the diamond insignia that identified him as a marshal of the International Peacekeeping Force.

Kelly came buzzing into the room on an electric wheelchair, one leg wrapped in a plastic bandage.

"You're hurt," Jay blurted, feeling woolly-headed, stupid.

"They didn't give up after you tossed the nuke into the crusher," she explained cheerfully. "We had a bit of a fire fight."

"This young lady," Hazard said, his gravelly voice resuming some of its normal bellow, "not only held off four fanatics, but managed to patch your suit at the same time, thereby saving your life."

Jay muttered, "Thanks. A lot."

Clasping his hands behind his back and standing spraddle-legged in the middle of the hospital room, Hazard took over the conversation. "The terrorists had launched an attack on the Moonbase security office itself, designed to keep the base security forces tied up while they planted the nuke and waited for it to go off."

"That's why we got no response from base security," Jay interjected.

"This really was a Peacekeepers' operation," Jay said to her.

"No way! We just called your father when you went into surgery."

"How long have I been out?"

"Three days."

Turning to his father, Jay said, "You must've taken a high-energy express to get here so quick."

Hazard's face reddened slightly. "Well," he blustered, "you're the only son I've got, after all."

"You really care that much about me?"

"I've always cared about you," the older man said.

Kelly was grinning at the two of them.

Abruptly, Hazard turned for the door. "I've got to contact Geneva. Got to get some forensics people up here to look at the remains of that nuke. Maybe we can get some info on where it's been hidden all this time. Might help us find the others that're missing. I'll be back later."

"Okay, Dad. Thanks."

"Thanks?" Hazard shot him a puzzled look.

"For everything."

The old man made a sour face and pushed through the door.

"You're embarrassing him," Kelly laughed and wheeled her chair close to the bed.

"You saved my life," Jay said.

"Not me. You were clinically dead when the medics reached us. They pulled you back."

He licked his dry lips, then, "You know, for a while there, I wasn't certain that I wanted to go on living. But you made me decide. I really owe you a lot for that."

Kelly beamed at him. "Welcome back to life, Jay. Welcome back to the human race."

— ABO —

## Bookshelf

(Continued from page 23)

can change his shape to look like anyone or anything.

*Starpirate's Brain* is old-fashioned, turn-your-brain-off action/adventure. Starpirate downloaded his brain into a computer chip for transfer to a new body, but the chip, which contains all kinds of priceless information, has been stolen. Jolson must find the brain and solve a murder, for which he's the prime suspect. All the women he encounters are beautiful, of course.

Jolson does some pretty stupid things for someone who was a spy in the Chameleon Corps for 20 years, like continually insisting on entering situations alone when every time he does he ends up unconscious. The book is often funny, but some jokes are

belabored too much. Unfortunately, the solution to the murder mystery is a cheat, because there's no evidence of the killer's motive until we find out whodunit.

The book's set in a far future universe, but it's not very futuristic — though the book centers around a science fictional device, as a whole this world is just like the present, only with spaceships and zappguns. It's not as good as Goulart's old Chameleon Corps stories, but if you like his other work, you'll enjoy it.

Rating: ☆ ☆ ½

*Buck Godot: PSmIth*  
By Phil Foglio  
Donning/Starblaze, 1988  
80 pp., \$7.95

There's not much you can say about a humorous graphic novel; either it's funny, or it isn't. The

second volume in the adventures of Buck Godot, the hard-drinking hired (zap)gun who is "always available but never free," is even funnier than the first one. In addition to the humor of the main story, Foglio sprinkles his books with outrageous sight gags. This one is highly recommended to anyone with a sense of humor.

Rating: ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆

— ABO —

UNTIL THERE IS  
NO LONELINESS,  
NO DESTITUTION,  
NO SICKNESS,  
NO WAR...

A4  
GMS

Please join.



March/April 1988

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# ABORIGINES

By Laurel Lucas

## Creative Diversity

If you like good old-fashioned space adventure, you'll really enjoy the novelette in this issue from BEN BOVA titled "Impact."

Bova is as well known for his editing as his writing, and he's as noted for his efforts to communicate science to the masses as he is for his work in the science fiction field.

In fact, his unique and varied career would be so difficult to summarize in the space I have, I'll have to be content to mention a few highlights.

He has written more than 70 novels and non-fiction books, in-



Ben Bova

cluding *Privateers*, *Millennium*, *Voyagers*, and one of my favorites, *Colony*.

He has been editor of *Analog* magazine and editorial director of *Omni* magazine and has won the Hugo Award for best professional editor six times.

His involvement in the fields of science and technology includes appearances on hundreds of radio and television broadcasts such as "Good Morning America" and the "Today" show, and popular lectures on topics ranging from the U.S. space program to writing.

His latest non-fiction book, *Welcome to Moonbase* (Ballantine), which deals with space technology, and his last novel, *The Kinsman Saga* (Tor), both came out last fall.

Bova used some of the technology he talks about in *Welcome to Moon-*



Bob Eggleton

base in a novel he is working on called *Peacekeepers*. "Impact" was excerpted from *Peacekeepers*, which is due out from Tor in October of this year.

Artist BOB EGGLETON illustrated "Impact," and his work is on our cover for the fourth time.

Eggleton was at the Boskone convention in Springfield, Massachusetts, recently, where he won the Jack Gaughan Memorial Award for best emerging artist, and a first place, chairman's choice, in the art show.

He's busy as ever with cover art for mystery and horror books for Tor, and added to that a science fiction series for young adults being published by Cloverdale Press.

Seems a lot of people have known about this talented artist's "emergence" for some time now, us included.

One elderly woman's need to combat the fear of violence leads her to drastic measures in "Sunshine Delight," by PAULE EDWARDS.

Edwards is a person with many identities, not the least of which is Paul E. Clinco, M.D., an Arizona physician and father of two.

But sometimes he is called Sir Gareth of Bloodwine Gorge, a thirteenth-century knight, or Bugi, son of

Wugi, a visionary Frankish peasant. Those are two of his identities in the Society for Creative Anachronism, a pastime this ex-theater major has wholeheartedly embraced.

Then there is his musical identity. When he's playing a gig, he's Professor Paul, the blues and boogie piano player.

Edwards sold his first story, "Three Knives in Ithkar," to Andre Norton for *Magic in Ithkar*, Vol. III, two years ago.

Recently he won first place in the Writers of the Future contest with the story "Heroic Measures."

Now he's at work on his first novel.

"Sunshine Delight" is illustrated by LESLIE PARDEW, a Utah artist with a background in commercial art and animation.

Pardey is currently doing a lot of computer art for a company that publishes computer games. He is also working on some products for the Spacey Love Corporation, a children's educational group, and putting



Paul Edwards

together a magazine with some colleagues.

This is his fourth appearance in ABO. His work was also the cover art for issue No. 6.



Elaine Radford

"To Be An Auk" is ELAINE RADFORD's tale about resurrecting an extinct species and teaching it how to be birdlike all over again.

Radford has a lot of experience with birds. Her latest book for TFH publishers is called *A Step-by-Step Book About Finches*.

She owns an extensive aviary and runs a stock photo file of birds, reptiles and fish with colleague Roger Williams.

Radford's first SF story, "The Ramsey Gryphon," appeared in *Amazing* in May of 1984.

Radford makes her third appearance in *ABO*, after bringing us "Passing" in issue No. 4 and "Letting Go" in issue No. 8.

Not surprisingly, Radford says she likes her bird-oriented stories the best.

The illustrator for "To Be An Auk" is DAVID R. DEITRICK, an Alaska resident who recently ventured south for Boskone.

He liked his work for this piece so much, he put it on exhibit at the convention.

Deitrick illustrated "Muttmind" in our last issue. He says right now he's working on some advertising for Arco, "boring stuff, but it pays really



David R. Deitrick

good."

When I asked him about the latest news of his Alaskan lifestyle, he told me he's been having to chase a moose away from the doghouse lately.

It seems the moose is attracted to the hay that Deitrick put in the doghouse for his dog and her four samoyed-beagle-malamut puppies. (Anyone looking for a sled dog?)

PAUL A. GILSTER manages to impart a genuinely creepy feeling to his story of isolation in Iceland, "When the Stranger Comes."

Gilster has visited the land of ice and summit meetings more than once. He says he is interested in the culture, and the setting came in handy when he needed a remote locale for his story.

The North Carolina resident has a full schedule of free-lance projects, and estimates he has written about 100 features, reviews and essays in the past 18 months.

His first short story sale was "Merchant Dying" in *ABO* No. 5, and he's now at work on three more short stories.

"When the Stranger Comes" is illustrated by LARRY BLAMIRE. I'm beginning to lose count of how much work Larry has done for *ABO*, but check out "It Came from the Slushpile" in issue No. 5 and "True Magic" in issue No. 7 for some prime examples.

## A Long Time Ago ...

Before taking charge at *Aboriginal Science Fiction*, our editor, Charles C. Ryan, was the editor of *Galileo*, a science fiction magazine published in the mid-1970s. During his tenure there, he helped discover a number of new writers who have since gone on to win Nebula and/or Hugo awards, writers such as Connie Willis, John Kessel, Lewis Shiner and more.

Now, on his behalf, we'd like to give you an opportunity to see some of the best stories he collected a decade ago.

*Starry Messenger: The Best of Galileo* (St. Martin's Press, 1979) features 12 stories by the following authors: Harlan Ellison, Brian Aldiss, Alan Dean Foster, Connie Willis, John Kessel, Kevin O'Donnell Jr., D.C. Poyer, M. Lucie Chin, Joe L. Hensley & Gene DeWeese, John A. Taylor, Gregor Hartmann, and Eugene Potter.

For a limited time, while copies last, you can purchase a first-edition hardcover copy of *Starry Messenger: The Best of Galileo* for \$10, plus \$1 postage and handling. If you would like your copy autographed by the editor, please indicate how you would like the note to read.

To order, send \$11 for each copy to: *Aboriginal Science Fiction*, Book Dept., P.O. Box 2449, Woburn, MA 01888.





Paul A. Gilster

Blamire is working on a book of "single-panel, bizarre, surrealistic" cartoons. In his other career, as an actor/playwright, he has good news/bad news.

The bad news is that his play "Why" won't be put on by the Gloucester Stage Company this fall after all, because of size limitations.

The good news is that the company has commissioned him to write



Larry Blamire

something with a smaller cast, which it will then showcase. Blamire says writing a small, intimate play will be change for him. "I'm going to take a whack at it," he says.



Chris Boyce

A woman scientist plays mathematical games with the universe in "Birthplace," by CHRIS BOYCE.

It's Boyce's first short story in more than a decade. He made his first sale in 1965.

Since he recently conditioned himself to rise at 5 a.m. to write, he has been working on a high-tech thriller.



Pat Morrissey

Boyce lives in Glasgow, Scotland, with his wife and kids, where he makes his career in news research and evidently likes his privacy.

On our ABO questionnaire he lists "questionnaires" as one of his pet peeves and "tranquility" as a pet love.

We get the message.

"Birthplace" is illustrated by PAT MORRISSEY, whose other work for ABO includes illustrating "Scout's Honor" in issue No. 7 and "The Darkfishers" in issue No. 5.

Morrissey spends a lot of her time



Bonita Kale  
See Editor's Notes  
Page 19

doing paintings for conventions. She is working on some detailed pieces for Nolacon in New Orleans in September and enjoyed the more serious-minded tone of Boskone this year.

A planetarium show that she,

along with Bob Eggleton, helped to illustrate, was scheduled to open at the Hartford Planetarium in February of this year.



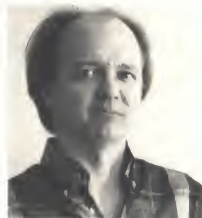
Elissa Malcohn

ELISSA MALCOHN is the author of the poem "All Creatures Great and Small."

Malcohn, a staff assistant at Harvard University Business School, says she is known as Keyboard Jockey of the Phosphor Screen at work.

Otherwise, she is known as the editor of *Star Line: Newsletter of the Science Fiction Poetry Association*.

Talk about being a born writer: Malcohn says she started keeping a journal at age 6 and won her first award for fiction at age 13. Her first



Jerry Workman

professional sale was the story "Lazuli" to Isaac Asimov's four years ago.

Her forthcoming projects include the story "Another Place" in *Amazing*, and "Some Kind of Darwinism," a poetry collection from Ocean View Books.

Malcohn lists some unusual travel destinations. She's been to the Galapagos Islands and to Siberia (voluntarily).

JERRY WORKMAN, cartoonist, makes his living as an art director in Ohio.

He made his first cartoon sale to *Starwind* magazine in November of 1987, and has also sold cartoons to



aviation magazines, including *Private Pilot*, *Aero* and *Kitplane*.

Aviation, in particular World War II airplanes, is one of his main hobbies. Comic strips is the other.

He says he admires the work of Berke Breathed ("Bloom County") and Gary Larson ("The Far Side"), and always wanted to be a cartoonist, till one day he gave it a try.

He is now working on some cartoons that deal with animal rights.

The headline in *USA Today* was "Prepare for a TV meltdown."

The article mentioned the fact that CBS will start filming the TV movie "Chernobyl," based on the acclaimed non-book of the same name by Frederik Pohl. Shooting reportedly starts in May in, would you believe it, the Soviet Union.

Lawrence Schiller, the man who produced the lavish "Peter the Great" miniseries for NBC, is in charge of this joint U.S./Soviet production.

Pohl has twice contributed to *ABO*: in issue No. 4 with "Search and Destroy" and, in issue No. 6, he wrote

the essay "Chernobyl and Challenger: That Was the Year That Was."

I spoke to Pohl recently, and he tells me that scriptwriter J.P. Miller was in the Ukraine in September doing his own research for the movie. The movie organizers have been interviewing Russian actors that they might want to cast, to give them time to learn English.

Pohl was in the Soviet Union about six weeks after the nuclear plant accident, and was surprised at the open discussion and criticism expressed at a convention of Soviet writers.

"They were saying all sorts of things in public. At one point

(Mikhail) Gorbachev came in, sat down, and listened."

Pohl said Soviet television and print has done some "pretty significant investigative journalism" about the accident, and he said his book has gotten "a very good reaction" there. There is even talk of translating it into Russian.

Pohl says he is officially a consultant to the movie production, but adds he won't be on location much. He'll be spending four months in the U.K. with wife Elizabeth Anne Hull, who is teaching there for a semester. Hull is also an *ABO* contributor and gave us "Second Best Friend" in *ABO* No. 2.

— ABO —

## Classifieds

(Classified ads are \$12 per column inch or 40¢ per word. A classified column is 2½ inches wide. Payment must accompany all classified orders. There is a 5% discount for running the same ad 6 times; a 10% discount for running the same ad 12 times.)

**FREE SAMPLE** Fantasy Mongers Quarterly, catalog (includes new Brian Lumley books: *Hero of Dreams*, *Compleat Crow*, etc.) 22-cent stamp: Ganley, Box 149, Buffalo, NY 14226. I-9

**I'VE BEEN SELLING** reasonably priced science fiction, fantasy and horror paperbacks, hardcovers and magazines since 1967. Free catalogs! Pandora's Books Ltd., Box ABO-54, Neche, ND 58265. I-9

**SCIENCE FICTION, FANTASY** books and magazines (new and used). Send \$1.00 for 64-page catalog. Collections purchased, large or small. Robert A. Madle, 4406 Bestor Drive, Rockville, MD, 20853. I-11

**VOLUNTEERS SOUGHT** for *Aboriginal SF*. Our magazine is growing and we need some part-time help. Volunteers must have their own transportation and live within commuting distance and be hard workers. A minimum commitment of 10 hours a week is required. There is a modest hourly payment for some of the office jobs. To apply, send a resume to: *Aboriginal SF*, Volunteer Dept., P.O. Box 2449, Woburn, MA 01888.

## All Creatures Great and Small

By Elissa Malcohn

*You have a little one at home — I mean a stag beetle, nothing compared to his Amazon cousin, or you. No, he's a good five centimeters long and lumbering, rocking like a semi in high winds across pebbles and red brick buckled up to the heat. He seemed to me ugly at first, then beautiful, simply because he was large. In a world of ants and flies and gentrified delicacy, he was unique — intimidating and yet, quite vulnerable.*

*Your shell could be my roof, a blacktop highway. To you I am soft pulp, gangly, with a head not worth severing at first bite. My eyes are blind to all but the simplest wavelengths; I can grasp only what my hands can hold. And my hair is limp as seaweed, without its saving nutrient grease.*

*Your mandibles glint with a patent leather sheen, over legs thick and magnificent. Your touch could crush me to a malformed ruin. If I am not food I am useless to you. If I am food, so be it; this is your planet.*

*But remember: I did not step where I could have, when the tables were turned. And your kind was beautiful to my sight and I was not afraid. On the Late Late Show the bugs died, by ray gun or, at station break, insecticide — as alien in my native soil as I am here. Such things were not my doing.*

*And so I ask of you —  
If you need to kill me, then kill me.  
But do not make me crawl first.*

— ABO —

# Stranger

(Continued from page 7)

Matthews came back shortly after daybreak. He stood in the doorway outlined against the whiteness of the mountains, shaking snow off his boots.

"Boy, it's cold!" he exclaimed. He slammed the door, throwing the bolt home. "I thought I'd look around a little, so I went up the slope."

Jon studied the shaggy face. Matthews' brown eyes were narrow. They peered at him carefully, as though holding something back.

"I think I'm going to move on," Matthews said. "You've been great to let me stay, but I better be on my way."

Jon smiled. "The storm," he said softly.

"It's not that bad now. It's cold, sure, but I can get to that cabin up the way. Twenty kilometers should be easy. After that, I'll sit it out a day if I have to, then on to Isafjordur."

Jon barely heard what he said. A deep, quiet part of his mind was laying out alternative futures. One future had Matthews going to Isafjordur, then to Reykjavik. When he told the authorities what he had seen on the mountain, the scientists would come, with their trucks and their equipment. They would spread out over the Eagle's Beak taking pictures and frightening the animals. The world would come in.

But there was another future. One in which Matthews did not go on to Isafjordur, and the scientists never came. That future could happen, as long as he was more careful the next time. Jon knew now that he should never have let Matthews into the house. Everything led remorselessly from that one mistake.



Cautiously, the aliens make their way through the Earth's ozone layer.

The rifle had not been fired in years, but Jon kept it clean. He took it down from its rack and opened it, pushing a single shell into the chamber before snapping it shut.

"What're you doing?" Matthews asked. His eyes flicked back and forth between Jon and the gun.

"I will walk partway with you," Jon said. "To make sure you are on the right path."

"What's the gun for?"

Jon never took his eyes off the boy. "Protection. As you say, this is wild, lonely country." He paused. "I thought you wanted to leave?"

"Yes," Matthews went into Einar's room and returned with his backpack, still breathing hard from the exertion of his descent of the ridge. He unzipped the pack and took out his gloves.

"What did you see up there?" Jon asked.

Matthews refused to look up. "Wreckage. Looks like a plane went down there once. A big one. When'd that happen, during the war?"

"Yes. During the war."

Jon was holding the gun so that the barrel pointed almost casually at Matthews' midsection. But the gun seemed to strengthen Matthews rather than scare him. "That 'plane' had no markings," he said, scowling. "And the metal was still smooth. I chipped off some of the ice and could see myself reflected in the wing."

"Go on."

"There were bones, too. Large, funny shaped." He stopped, faced Jon. "Look, are you taunting me? Or don't you know what that is up there?"

"We are wasting time," Jon said, the gun cradled under his arm. He walked toward the door. "Come. Before the storm gets worse."

But Matthews would have none of it. "Those bones aren't human. They're shaped wrong. And they're way too big."

"Not human," Jon said quietly.

"And you just let it sit up there? You don't tell anybody?"

"Sometimes I think how far from home it was." Jon threw the bolt and stared out into daylight. The valley opened wide, gaping to remotest north. "And how far from home we all are. All of us strangers."

By the time Jon returned, the snow had stopped and a hard, bitter wind scoured the valley. The gun barrel stank of burnt powder, just as it had that night forty years ago. The smell filled the room. Jon opened the door briefly, but the scent would not dissipate. It lingered far into the morning.

Things change their shapes in the northwest fjord country. That afternoon Jon went out to see about the sheep. Their water trough had frozen over. As he bent over it to chip out the ice, he could see his own form reflected, distorted by the crystalline surface into something no longer human. He paused, wiping off the top of the ice with his glove. It was as if a strange creature peered at him from within the deeps, pleading with him across a vast and inconsolable gulf.

Jon raised the hammer.

— ABO —



Flaming 88

# A Message From Our Alien Publisher

## The Wilkes-Barre Encounter

Ryan has made a photograph of me. He caught up to me at an automobile salvage facility near Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania. I was in the anuran configuration, due to reconfigure in another month, so the picture is of no real value, to him or anyone else.

In addition, my gamma surspirations overexposed his photographic film, and what he got appeared to be a blurry picture of a short person wearing an ill-made frog suit. It is no better than your average Loch Ness monster photo.

I had gone to Wilkes-Barre to relax and reflect on the human situation. If you avoid the work crews, a junkyard is a quiet place. Acres and acres of inanimate automobiles: roofs flattened, their glass in shards, their rest unshod, fractured, hemorrhaging upholstery, redolent of rust and burning rubber, caked with a gritty dust. It reminds me very much of home.

I found a deserted pathway, surrounded on two sides by stacks of mashed Dodge Volare station wagons. Hopping up out of the cinders to a more-or-less serviceable tailgate, I lit a cigarette and pushed my hat down over one eye. When I raised the nictitating membrane of my other eye against a swirling dust cloud, my vision was impaired momentarily. I heard cinders crunching underfoot, a heavy, mechanical clicking, and the whir of a tiny electric motor. I opened my eye and looked down to find Ryan gazing up at me, camera in hand.

"I need the picture for ABO," he said. ABO is the nickname he uses for the science fiction magazine he "edits" from my field reports.

I didn't stay around to talk with him. I hopped away.

He went to a lot of trouble to get that photograph, but then he is a human being. Convinced that a portrait says something meaningful about me, he has turned his fuzzy photo over to one of his imaginative artists for a "rendering," which he now prints beside my covering message in his magazine. Why would he want to publish a picture of one of my 86 configurations? As I say, he is a human being. It colors his view of things.

A human being lives his entire life in the body he was born with. Yes, it grows here and there to accommodate his burgeoning spirit. It hardens in some places and softens in others in accordance with the demands he makes on it, gains hair, loses hair, grows, shrinks, and changes color, but (barring serious accident), a human body travels through life in the same basic shape in which it began. No larval, pupal, or intermediary stages. This fixed body shape encourages human beings to define themselves in terms of the little prisons in which they live their lives.

I am attaching the text of a book called *Thinner Thighs in Thirty Days*, annual reports for the last five years from the Department of Water and Sewers of the City of Rocky Flats, a book called *The Sure-Fire Job Changing System, The Complete Guide to Inexpensive Home Improvements*, the owner's manuals for three different makes of videocassette recorders, the report of the United States Census Bureau for the major metropolitan areas, and an assortment of short fiction and poetry. Do you see what I mean?

If not, consider the technology of hearing aids.



Human beings have produced a range of devices for enhancing and clarifying sound in order to help them overcome hearing impairments. But virtually all the energy and investment in the development of these devices has been channeled into making them more cosmetic, rather than better. The users of hearing aids routinely tolerate feedback squeals, tinny sound quality, and intermittent effectiveness, but they usually look pretty good by human standards. It is not that human beings are incapable of producing hearing aids that work well; it's just that none of them is willing to walk around wearing something that is obviously hearing equipment.

Then there is the lawyer with athetosis. The disease is a variant of cerebral palsy, and it disabled her from birth. By the time she was a teen-ager, however, she had learned to live with it and had become quite functional. At that point her family moved to a metropolitan area, where she was given access to sophisticated medical care. A well-known orthopedist evaluated her ungainly gait, watched the way her right leg turned in, and prescribed surgery to sever the adductor muscle. This, he felt, would cause the leg to turn back the way it should.

The successful surgery turned her leg back the way it was supposed to be and substantially reduced the speed and effectiveness of her walk, (all at the cost of a great deal of physical

pain). It is the essence of human medicine (as with most other human undertakings) to pursue normality, even at the expense of functionality. You will doubtless find this idea of normality hard to understand at first, and I am not entirely sure I can explain it anyway.

The human being lives his whole life as the same organism and therefore considers the organism to be the extent of himself. This is his identity. He

has no other. When our great philosopher, Rana Catesbeiana, showed us that every person is a system, of which the organism is only a part, he gave us a great gift and liberated us from many of the concerns that plague human beings. The actual essence of a human life, that network of aspirations, obligations, relationships, beliefs, encumbrances, values, liabilities, and influence, is considered by these creatures to be transitory, where the body is

permanent. You see, it is a view precisely opposite from ours.

Of course they are tyrannized by this assumption, but it is so fundamental to their outlook that they don't realize it. I am sometimes overwhelmed with sympathy for them in their limitations. Sometimes there is nothing I can do but repair to a good junkyard. If only Ryan would leave me alone.

— ABO —

## Boomerangs

(Continued from page 31)

only people who want his services are governments, corporations and that ilk.

There goes modern civilization. (Er, I've got a whole bunch of doodads in my garage. What'll you give me for them? — Ed.)

Unless a simple-to-carry, otherwise useless, standard is used to exchange goods and services. Enter money, in all its various forms.

(Plastic credit cards are intrinsically valuable, as well. They work real well to open locked doors.)

However, rituals such as the stock market crash are still a puzzle to me. Maybe it has to do with vows of poverty, or modern flagellation?

I dunno. I've always thought we humans are a bit 'tetched anyway.

Sincerely,  
A (restless) native

Dear Mr. Ryan,  
I just finished reading the Nov.-Dec. issue and, on the whole, I liked it. But I do have a bone to pick with Darrell Schweitzer on his review of Robert Heinlein's book *To Sail Beyond the Sunset*.

In the review, he calls Heinlein's earlier books *I Will Fear No Evil* a "disaster" and *Time Enough For Love* "stupefying," at least in part. While Schweitzer is careful to point out all such reviews are subjective, not objective, his problems with Heinlein's perennial tendency to talk about how he thinks people should live, react to politics, morality, etc. do bother me. Personally, I think the two books mentioned above are much better than the later ones Heinlein writes that revolve around mixing in characters from his other novels.

But the thing I've liked about Heinlein through twenty-five years of reading him is that he does two things well — first, he entertains and second, his stories are always thought-provoking, they always encourage you to challenge the accepted dogmas of the day. To me, those are the hallmarks of a writer, not a polemicist.

Schweitzer has problems with Heinlein's attitude on sex ("sexual mores are a matter of individual responsibility" — but aren't they *always*?), his characters are "utterly untouched by the Christian values of compassion and charity" (the whole point of *Time Enough For Love* was Lazarus Long's wrestling with the selfishness of suicide, and finding out he needed to live for others), his "patriotic jingoism" (well, it is true people are trying to break into our country, not out of it as with the Soviet Union), and other attitudes I would suspect he'd see as "unreconstructed libertarianism."

Fine. Variety is the spice of life. I don't mind that Heinlein is too "jingoistic" to be "in" these days with some parts of our society that insist on wanting to see the world as they wish it were, rather than as it is. I do patiently urge Mr. Schweitzer to judge any author's novel on its own merits, rather than in a "guilty by association" litany of commentary that's peripheral to the novel being reviewed. I've only sold two novels, with the first due out next summer, and I hope whatever trade journals review them do so with a little more distance between the work and the writer's personal views. I liked Mr. Schweitzer's comments on the other books he reviewed, but it seems as if Heinlein sets off a certain reaction. Too bad.

Among the stories you ran, I liked especially "Scout's Honor" by Joanne Mitchell. While I can't buy the idea that some interstellar "league" would want to waste its resources and time trying to enforce a "fence the humans in" policy if we somehow didn't "measure up" to their idea of civilized, I did like the characterization, the plot, and the tongue-in-cheek resolution. Bravo, Mrs. Mitchell.

Best wishes,  
T. Jackson King  
Bend, OR

Dear Charles Ryan and the Rest of the Tribe,

Whatever you are doing to make ABO so damn good, keep it up! Keep it up with the fine writers and artists who fill your pages with such beauty. Keep it up with the book and movie

reviews and the author/artist bios. And definitely keep it up with the editorial policy that gives ABO the flavor that reminds me of the old days with *Galileo* (but alas, one cannot live in the past).

The Alien Publisher does not need a name, as he is unique. Humans only need names because there are five billion-plus of us crowded on this orb and names are more expedient than calling each other Hey-You. Even if you were to hang a handle on the poor guy (like I.M.A. Shyffellow) it would not decrease the mail he gets addressed to "Resident," "Occupant," or "Boxholder."

Please send me both your writer's and artist's guidelines. ABO is one game I've got to get in on.

Aboriginally Yours,  
J.B. Neumann  
San Francisco, CA

Dear Mr. Ryan and staff,

I am not a person who ordinarily writes to magazines or to anyone for that matter. However, I felt so good after reading the latest issue (Nov./Dec. 1987) of ABO that I wanted to tell you how much I enjoyed it.

First of all, I really like the new format. It's easy to carry, easy to store, and it looks sharp! (*Even sharper, now that it's slick.* — Ed.)

Secondly, your choice of story content has continued to delight me. I never know what to expect, (except for some of the best SF anywhere), and, therefore, I'm always pleasantly surprised at what I find between ABO's covers.

Finally, your November-December issue contained the best surprise yet! I am referring to Mr. Ryan's encouraging advice to novice SF writers. Being a novice myself, I found this editorial ("On Becoming a Writer") to be just the kind of encouragement a writer needs. After all, writers meet with enough rejection without hearing an editor tell them "Don't bother — we're too busy!"

As a result, I am requesting a copy of your writer's guidelines. I have enclosed a self-addressed, stamped envelope for your convenience.



Once again, thank you for your encouragement, and keep up the good work!

Respectfully,  
Jay S. Kingston  
Warwick, RI

To whom it may concern:

I bought and read your magazine for the first time (Issue #7) recently. I found that it was the magazine I'd been looking for. I love science fiction and here it is—a magazine devoted to it. Imagine that!

Well anyway, so now I've decided I want all your back issues. Yes, all of them, Nos. 1-6 and here's a check. Keep up the good work. (Now there's a smart subscriber. Those back issues will probably be worth millions (of something) someday. —Ed.)

Rose Barger  
Washington, D.C.

Dear Charlie,

I seldom reply to book reviews, but then I've seldom seen one as shallow and hurtful as Janice Eisen's review of *Ether Ore*, by H.C. Turk.

If all that your reviewer saw in *Ether Ore* was puns, then she ought to be given a seeing-eye dog and a cupful of pencils and sent out to ply her natural trade. And for a reviewer to stop reading halfway through the book (I suspect it was after only a few pages, actually) is a cheat: the reviewer's responsibility is to read the book; otherwise she is taking money under false pretenses. Especially a novel by a new writer!

Had your reviewer some depth of intellect and even a slight measure of wit, she would have seen that Turk is an original stylist — something that happens so rarely in this field that we should treasure each such appearance. She might also have detected a truly affecting story about a willful young lady who comes of age by meeting and conquering some (literally) bone-crushing adversity. But she never read that far.

She has done a cruel disservice to H.C. Turk — and to those of your readers who will be turned off *Ether Ore* by her slapdash review.

In fury,  
Ben Bova  
West Hartford, CT

(Dear Ben, as long as I've known you, you have always been a gentleman, so I was a tad surprised that you chose to attack the reviewer, rather than disagree with the review — which you, or anyone should feel free to do. Book reviews express the opinion of the reviewer on an issue of taste. And intelligent people can differ in their tastes. As the former editor of *Analog* and *Omni*, I know you know that. Actually, I didn't see the review as a negative one per se. In fact, I suspect those readers who like puns will rush to the stores to get a copy,

and if there's more in it for them, so much the better. —Ed.)

Dear Mr. Ryan,

I am enclosing a check for my subscription renewal, at the intelligent rate. I was lucky enough to see your ad in time for my original subscription to include the first issue. I have enjoyed every issue since.

I just finished reading issue #8. The new paper improves the look of the art work. I particularly liked the interior illustration (By Bob Eggleton, who also did the cover. —Ed.) for "Solo for Concert Grand" (by Kristine Kathryn Rusch). I may be a bit biased, though, I also thought the story was the best in the issue. Every issue has had one story which edged a little above the others, for me. In issue #7, though, I could not make up my mind between "Scout's Honor" (By Joanne Mitchell) and "What Brothers Are For" (By Patricia Anthony).

I do have one small complaint. It is not something which would keep me from renewing (obviously, since I am renewing). It is something you might consider for the future, though. When issue #8 arrived there were nicks and tears all around the three open edges of the magazine. This never happened with the stiffer paper you used before. If you intend to stay with the new paper, you may have to start mailing in a wrapper. (See "Editor's Notes." —Ed.)

Already waiting for the next one,  
Jim Anderson  
Springfield, IL

Dear Mr. Ryan,

Like many others, I find your publication to be excellent. The new format with the slick pages indicates that you are going places. The stories you are printing are wonderful and I am sure you have found some great new authors. Keep up the good work!

The only complaint I have at this time is that the address label on the cover destroys the art work of the cover. How about using a label that comes off the paper leaving no residue or tearing? (*Analog* uses such a label.) Thank you for an excellent magazine.

Sincerely yours,  
Forrest A. Rhoads  
Newport Beach, CA

(How about a baggie? — See my editor's notes in this issue. The paper is actually more expensive, but slightly less bulky than the paper we used before. And, since we went through so much trouble to make ABO the best-looking magazine in the field, we decided to bag it to give it a fighting chance in its trip through the mails. No more labels on the cover art. —Ed.)

Dear Alien Publisher:  
The urge to renew my subscription became positively resistible when  
March/April 1988

your editor said he agreed with Mr. Vaughan that tots and teens should be barred from libraries. I got hooked on Science Fiction fifty years ago, IN THE LIBRARY. I've been helping to support jerks like these ever since. (The Editor said nothing of the kind. Our *Aborigines'* columnist did. —Ed.) I raised three children who were making trips to the library as soon as they could walk. My two grandchildren, ages four and seven, go to the library weekly, and the seven-year old is just finishing a program that required her to read twenty books.

This country has a serious literacy problem; if these yahoos want somebody around to read their trash in fifteen years they'd better both go down on their knees and lead a pre-kindergarten story hour at the local public library. (If you wish your concerns to be taken seriously, you should avoid ad hominem comments. Mr. Vaughan and Ms. Lucas aren't "jerks" or "yahoos". I suspect that if you had thought for a moment or two you would have realized they were referring to undisciplined children who use the library as a playground, rather than youngsters there to read or study. Like you, I also got hooked early and I made much use of the local library. Children should be encouraged to use the library, but they should be encouraged to use it for the correct purpose. —Ed.)

Betty Sullivan Noak  
Cincinnati, OH

Dear Mr. Ryan:

Please enter my order for one copy of *Starry Messenger: the Best of Galileo*. A check in the amount of \$11.00 is enclosed. Please inscribe my book as follows:

"To Rick Hauptmann,  
"Words alone cannot express the deep gratitude I feel for the years of guidance, advice and direction you have provided me. Your patience during those times when I have strayed from the path you so carefully designed by thoroughly evaluating my strengths and weaknesses, is one of the myriad virtues you possess which continue to amaze me. Everything that I am today, I owe to you. I pray that you will continue to be there when I need you, while at the same time I know that your incredible philanthropy would prohibit you from any other course of action. Again, thanks for being you.

"Yours in Campbell,  
"/s/ Charles C. Ryan"  
— OR —

"Thanks for the ten bucks."  
Please feel free to choose the inscription you feel best suits your true thoughts about me. (Depending on which alternate reality you inhabit, they're both true — anyhow thanks for the ten bucks. —Ed.)

Sincerely,  
R. Alan Hauptmann  
Cloviss, NM

— ABO —



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## More Art On Page 64

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ABO #9

# Sunshine Delight

(Continued from page 29)

"I... I go with you."

"Are you all having a problem?"

One by one, the elderly folk of Sunshine Delight shook their heads and turned back to their rooms, moping as though already bereft of yet another of their friends.

\*\*\*\*\*

At Maud's insistence, the cab let them out a block from the theater. They stepped into the neon day-bright center city, the static electricity crush of hundreds of bodies urgently moving who-knew-where to the thudding beat of the young people's "Crash Music" blaring from scores of pocket "fi's": the whiz of cymbal sizzle, the migrainous pounding of electronic basses, the atonal whine of tortured electric bouzouks. Above it all churned the symphony of a thousand electric motors: cars and trucks spewing ozone, which replaced the choking fumes of burning gasoline as the predominant smell of central city life. Lars shuddered, but Maud enjoyed her new curiosity about the world she used to fear. Everyone shone from a slight patina of perspiration, but the worst were the sweaty young people dressed in their vinyls and diffraction gratings, tasteless joke fetishes with heavy makeup and tawdry baubles, revolving about their heroes, the lead-faced veterans, who stood against the concrete walls of Greater Phoenix, enjoying a respite of drug-induced catatonia. Curb-to-building crowds pushed against the two old people. They breasted the tide and slowly approached the movie house.

In front of the ticket booth, Maud was jostled into some of the bizarre people who had been staring blankly at her faded Grateful Dead T-shirt.

"Watch it, grandma!" snarled one of the boys. He raised his arm; it might have been intended as a threat. Passers-by ignored him.

"Were you talking to me?"

"Yeah, lady. Don't bump into me no more."

Lars tugged at her arm. "Let's go, Maud."

Maud stared up into the boy's eyes. "Are you going to hit an old lady?" she asked.

He sneered. "You never know." His friends tittered.

The crowds surged again, and Maud was knocked off balance. She caught herself with her cane, but bumped into the boy anyway.

"Look, I told you—"

Maud smiled at him, and a rosy flush suffused her face. "You need a lesson in manners," she said, and brought the point of her cane down on his foot as hard as she could.

The plastic boot was poor armor against the metal tip of the umbrella. "You burned-out antiques!" the boy yelled as he hopped backwards and fell to the sidewalk. Lars pulled Maud away and into the theater.

"Fine thing, now they wait for us when we get out. What's with you, Maud? You been reading those mysteries too much."

She grinned at him. "I feel fine, dear. Popcorn?"

"The doctor said no salt—"

"Two medium popcorns," Maud said to the girl behind the Plexiglas counter. "One plain, one with extra salt and butter."

\*\*\*\*\*

The movie had already started. The plot didn't matter, as Sylvester was just as beautiful as ever. Single-handedly he reconquered the Falkland Islands from the Argentine villains, deltoids and biceps rippling as cartridge cases flew out of his machine gun. Halfway through the movie, Lars noticed how Maud seemed to lean forward during the combat episodes, and munched her popcorn when Sylvester groped the Italian actress. Her whole attitude seemed strange, different. It was very disturbing.

\*\*\*\*\*

They sat for a moment in fluorescent light as the theater emptied.

"He's so lovely," Maud said. "I used to date a body builder. Of course, that was a long time ago."

Lars regarded her. "Overnight you not afraid of anything. It's like you ain't the same person as yesterday."

"Nonsense! I'm just not ready to give up, that's all."

"Those sleaze-balls wait for us out there."

Maud laughed. "So does a taxi. Let's go."

Two hours had changed neither the noise nor the energy of the crowds. Traffic crept down the one-way street. Lars, firmly holding Maud's arm, attempted to guide her toward the curb, but halfway down the block, a surge of human pressure plunged them into an alley separating two buildings. The tide pushed along the sidewalk, but here, in the quieter dark, a single shimmering Crash chord exploded up twenty concrete stories into the night. They turned to see a half dozen street people staring at them, grouped around a tall man with a shaven forehead and long hair down his back. His pasty-white skin accentuated the hollows of his unmovable eyes.

Lars, unable to take his eyes from the veteran, reached blindly for Maud to pull her away.

"Mr. Sparkhead, I believe," Maud said. The young people laughed, a humorless sound.

"You're the lady that fell down."

"Yes, I am. Thank you again for helping me."

"You hurt my friend."

Maud smiled. "Well, not very bad, I'm sure. He said he was going to hit me. He actually raised his hand to me, can you imagine that?"

"You hurt my friend."

"Maud," Lars shouted, "we get out of here now." He gripped Maud's elbow with his arm and wheeled her around.

Sparkhead was there in an instant.

"Don't grab the old lady. She said she don't want to be grabbed." A huge muscular fist encircled Lars' forearm.

"Get your hands off me, sleaze-ball!" He punched the wirehead in the chest.

The impact turned him on like an electric switch. Sparkhead ripped the old man away from Maud, threw him against the wall, and held him there, heels a few inches above the asphalt, with a hand against his throat.

"You gonna take me on, man? I show you." He cocked back a fist, and punched at Lars' face.

"No!" screamed Maud, swinging her cane. The gang leapt up as the gnarled wood slammed into the nape of Sparkhead's neck.

It was enough. Sparkhead dropped Lars, who folded up on the ground, and the punch struck concrete. But Sparkhead never felt the fractures. With a long, high-pitched cry, he fell stiffly backward, violent spasms racking his body, his face contorted in random twitches and grimaces. His teeth came down hard on his tongue; blood poured into the alley. The young people were appalled. Lars and Maud, however, had seen *grand mal* seizures before.

"Lars, are you all right?"

He pulled himself to his feet. "Yah, I'll be fine." He rubbed his neck, looked down at his attacker. "You hit him a good one."

The seizure evidently reached his rectum and bladder, and continued unabated. "I think I hit him in his wires," Maud said. She reached her arm out, and Lars took it. "God, that felt good."

Lars looked at her, not sure if he heard her correctly. Then he shrugged. "One, Two, Three, What are we waiting for?" he sang, leading her into the crowds moving along the thoroughfare. This time, they had no trouble getting to the sidewalk, hailing a cab, and getting home.

\*\*\*\*\*

"You're back!"

"Oh, we were so worried!"

"Where have you been?"

Lars smiled. "Get a paper tomorrow."

"Dear friends. The movie was great fun. There's nothing to be alarmed about." But it took twenty minutes of Maud's reassurance before the last of the residents of Sunshine Delight were able to get to bed.

Lars regarded his friend. "I don't know what's gotten into you," he said. Maud smiled as he added, "I feel less afraid now, too. Well, I go to bed."

"Just a minute, Lars. I bought you a little present. Will you open it tonight? Before the girl comes in the morning?"

The long, thin package in the hall closet weighed close to ten pounds. Lars grinned as he pulled the polished walnut from the box and ran his fingers over the blue steel.

"It's twelve gauge," said Maud. "Want to come out with me tomorrow and look for some sleaze-balls?"

— ABO —

## To Be An Auk

(Continued from page 13)

Then the first shark bounded up free. Sarah slapped it firmly, half to show she was healthy and dominant and too much trouble to eat, half almost playfully. "Go on now, I've got others to take care of."

It made a strange sound and then leapt away, its body making a joyful arc as it danced at the interface of air and water. It could not have understood her, of

course. But I noticed that it danced well away from the frightened flock of auks.

"You too," she said to me. "Go on, get out of here. You don't have to trust me. I realize now that that's beyond you. No matter how much I do for those birds, they'll always be yours. Just yours. No one else could possibly care enough—" Her voice trembled for a moment. "So go on with your birds. Take them on ahead. I'll catch up when I'm done down here."

I said nothing. I hadn't quite digested what I had just seen. So I climbed in my raft and headed out. The auks, given the choice, followed me. It was hard to persuade them to stay on the beach where I left them. I had to sit with them awhile, let them drop off to sleep.

Then I slipped away to rejoin Sarah. There was a lot of work to get done before the night was through.

\*\*\*\*\*

"A ghost net," she said, much later. "That's what they call them. Old gill nets made of some non-biodegradable plastic ... they don't know they're lost; they don't know it's time to stop fishing. People sometimes see them far offshore, tangled around the bodies of whales."

I shivered. But the horror was already fading. The auks were gambling on their winter island, their mouths opening like flowers whenever the interviewer from the news team picked up a fish. "Those birds are still too friendly," I said.

"According to the records, great auks were always too friendly for their own good," Sarah replied. "But maybe we'll deserve it this time. Have you seen the mail yet?"

I looked at her. She handed me a fat packet of letters that I hadn't asked anyone to save for us. "Volunteers," she whispered. "Looks like there's going to be people willing to help your birds get where they're going as long as they need it."

I held the letters in my hand, amazed. Slowly, I shook my head. They'll forget, I thought. They'll get bored. It isn't possible that they'd really go through all that's required.

Then I looked at Sarah standing there, and it occurred to me at last that she'd been there every step of the way. I saw again the flash of her knife, the auks leaping free. The shark leaping free. Inside my chest, then, something leapt too, just a little, as I realized that maybe I didn't have to carry the burden for the whole human species alone after all. "Maybe you're right," I said. "Maybe I'm going to have to stop calling those birds 'mine.'"

Sarah smiled, and I found myself moving toward her, my stiff arms opening awkwardly to hug her to my chest.



— ABO —



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ABO #7



ABO #8

